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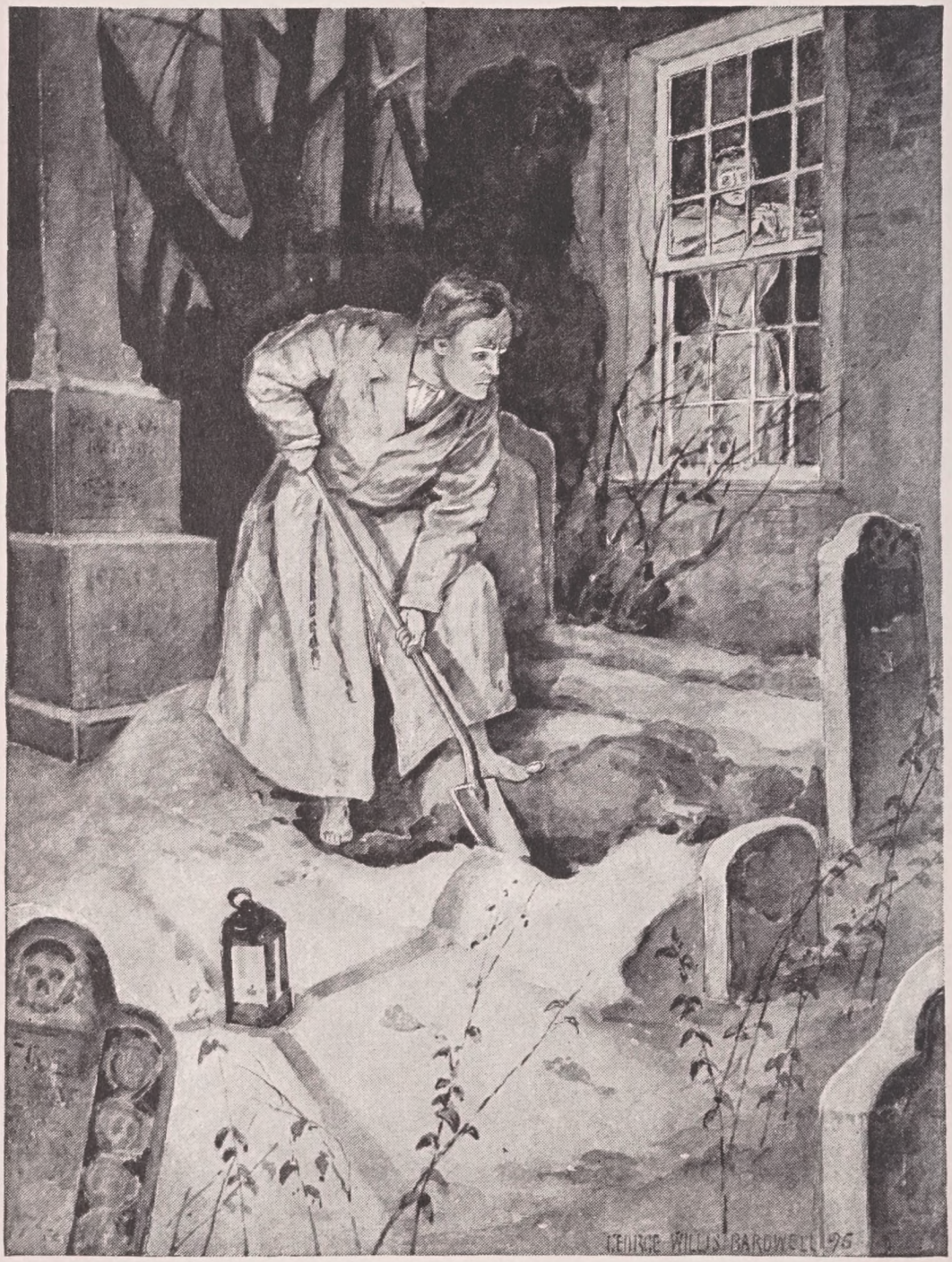

"MERCIFUL HEAVENS, WAS THAT THE DOCTOR?"—SEE PAGE 228.

DOCTOR IZARD

BY

ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

(Mrs. Charles Rohlfs)

Author of "The Leavenworth Case," "Marked 'Personal,'"
"The Doctor, His Wife, and the Clock," etc., etc.

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To My Friend

JOSEPH FRANCIS DALY

A. K. G. R.

CONTENTS.

DOCTOR IZARD.

PART I.

A MIDNIGHT VISITANT.

I.

NO. THIRTEEN, WARD THIRTEEN.

IT was after midnight. Quiet had settled over the hospital, and in Ward 13 there was no sound and scarcely a movement. The nurse, a strong and beautiful figure, had fallen into a reverie, and the two patients, which were all the ward contained, lay in a sleep so deep that it seemed to foreshadow the death which was hovering over them both.

They were both men. The one on the right of the nurse was middle-aged; the one on the

left somewhat older. Both were gaunt, both were hollow-eyed, both had been given up by the doctors and attendants. Yet there was one point of difference between them. He on the left, the older of the two, had an incurable complaint for which no remedy was possible, while he on the right, though seemingly as ill as his fellow, was less seriously affected, and stood some chance of being saved if only he would arouse from his apathy and exert his will toward living. But nothing had as yet been found to interest him, and he seemed likely to die from sheer inanition. It is through this man's eyes that we must observe the scene which presently took place in this quiet room.

He had been lying, as I have said, in a dreamless sleep, when something—he never knew what—made him conscious of himself and partially awake to his surroundings. He found himself listening, but there was no sound; and his eyes, which he had not unclosed for hours, slowly opened, and through the shadows which encompassed him broke a dim vision of the silent ward and the sitting figure of the weary nurse. It was an accustomed sight, and his

eyes were softly re-closing when a sudden movement on the part of the nurse roused him again to something like interest, and though his apathy was yet too great for him to make a movement or utter a sound, he perceived, though with dim eyes at first, that the door at the other end of the ward had slowly opened, and that two men were advancing down the room to the place where the nurse stood waiting in evident surprise to greet them. One was the hospital doctor, and on him the sick man cast but a single glance; but the person with him was a stranger, and upon him the attention of the silent watcher became presently concentrated, for his appearance was singular and his errand one of evident mystery.

There was but one light in the room, and this was burning low, so that the impression received was general rather than particular. He saw before him a medium-sized man who sought to hide his face from observation, though this face was already sufficiently shielded by the semi-darkness and by the brim of a large hat which for some reason he had omitted to remove. Around his shoulders

there hung a cloak of an old-fashioned type, and as he approached the spot where the nurse stood, his form, which had shown some dignity while he was advancing, contracted itself in such a fashion that he looked smaller than he really was.

The physician who accompanied him was the first to speak.

"Is No. Twelve asleep?" he asked.

The nurse bowed slightly, half turning her head as she did so.

The watching man was No. Thirteen, not No. Twelve, but his eyes shut at the question, perhaps because he was still overcome by his apathy, perhaps because his curiosity had been aroused and he feared to stop events by betraying his interest in them.

"I am afraid we shall have to wake him," pursued the attendant physician. "This gentleman here, who declines to give his name, but who has brought letters which sufficiently recommend him to our regard, professes to have business with this patient which will not keep till morning. Has the patient shown any further signs of sinking?"

She answered in a cheerful tone that he had slept since ten without waking, and the two men began to approach. As they did so both turned toward the bed of the second sick man, and one of them, the stranger, remarked with something like doubt in his tones, "Is this man as low as he looks? Is he dying, too?"

The answer was a qualified one, and the stranger appeared to turn his back, but presently the strained ears of the seemingly unconscious man heard a breath panting near his own, and was conscious of some person bending over his cot. Next minute the question was whispered in his hearing:

"Are you sure this man is asleep?"

The doctor, who was standing close by, murmured an affirmative, and the nurse to whom the questioner had apparently turned, observed without any hesitation in her slightly mystified tone:

"I have not seen him move since eight o'clock; besides, if he were awake, he would show no consciousness. He is dying from sheer hopelessness, and a cannon fired at his side would not rouse him."

The "humph" which this assurance called forth from the stranger had a peculiar sound in it, but the attention which had been directed to No. Thirteen now passed to his neighbor, and the former, feeling himself for the instant unobserved, partially opened his eyes to see how that neighbor was affected by it. A few whispered words had accomplished what a cannon had been thought unable to do, and he was beginning to realize an interest in life, or at least in what was going on in reference to his fellow patient. The words were these:

"This is a hopeless case, is it?"

"Yes, sir."

"How long a time do you give him?"

The tone was professional, though not entirely unsympathetic.

"Dr. Sweet says a week; I say three days."

The stranger bent over the patient, and it was at this point that the watcher's eyes opened.

"Three days is nearer the mark," the visitor at last declared.

At which the attending physician bowed.

"I should be glad to have a few moments' conversation with your patient," the stranger now pursued. "If he is unhappy, I think I can bring him comfort. He has relatives, you say."

"Yes, a daughter, over whose helpless position he constantly grieves."

"He is poor, then?"

"Very."

"Good! I have pleasant news for him. Will you allow me to rouse him?"

"Certainly, if you have a communication justifying the slight shock."

The stranger, whose head had sunk upon his breast, cast a keen look around. "I beg your pardon," said he, "but I must speak to the man alone; he himself would choose it, but neither you nor the nurse need leave the room."

The doctor bowed and withdrew with marked respect; the nurse lingered a moment, during which both of the sick men lay equally quiet and death-like; then she also stepped aside. The stranger was left standing between the two beds.

Soon the sensitive ears of the watchful one heard these words: "Your little daughter sends her love."

Opening his eyes a trifle, he saw the stranger bending over the other's pillow. A sigh which was not new to his ears rose from his dying companion, at sound of which the stranger added softly:

"You fear to leave the child, but God is merciful. He makes it possible for you to provide for her; do you want to hear how?"

A low cry, then a sudden feeble move, and No. Twelve was speaking in hurried, startled words:

"Who are you, sir? What do you want with me, and what are you saying about my child? I don't know you."

"No? And yet I am likely to be your greatest benefactor. But first take these few drops; they will help you to understand me. You are afraid? You need not be. I am—" He whispered a name into the sick man's ear which his companion could not catch. "That is our secret," he added, "and one which I charge you to preserve."

No. Thirteen, unable to restrain his curiosity at this, stole another glance at the adjoining cot from under his scarcely lifted lids. His moribund neighbor had risen partially on his pillow and was gazing with burning intensity at the man who was leaning toward him.

"O sir," came from the pale and working lips, as he tried to raise a feeble hand. "You mean to help my little one, you? But why should you do it? What claim has my misfortune or her innocence on you that you should concern yourself with our desperate condition?"

"No claim," came in the stranger's calm but impressive tones. "It is not charity I seek to bestow on you, but payment for a service you can render me. A perfectly legitimate, though somewhat unusual one," he hastened to add, as the man's face showed doubt.

"What—what is it?" faltered from the sick man's lips in mingled doubt and hope. "What can a poor and wretched being, doomed to speedy death, do for a man like you? I fear you are mocking me, sir."

"You can be the medium—" the words

came slowly and with some hesitation—"for the payment of a debt I dare not liquidate in my own person. I owe someone—a large amount—of money. If I give it to you—" (he leaned closer and spoke lower, but the ears that were listening were very sharp, and not a syllable was lost) "will you give it to the person whom I will name?"

"But how? When? I am dying, they say, and——"

"Do not worry about the whens and hows. I will make all that easy. The question is, will you, for the sum of five thousand dollars, which I here show you in ten five-hundred-dollar bills, consent to sign a will, bequeathing this other little package of money to a certain young woman whom I will name?"

"Five thousand dollars? O sir, do not mislead a dying man. Five thousand dollars? Why, it would be a fortune to Lucy!"

"A fortune that she shall have," the other assured him.

"Just for signing my name?"

"Just for signing your name to a will which will bequeath the rest of your belongings,

namely, this little package, to an equally young and equally unfortunate girl."

"It seems right. I do not see anything wrong in it," murmured the dying father in a voice that had strangely strengthened. "Will you assure me that it is all right, and that no one will suffer by my action?"

"Did I not tell you who I was?" asked the stranger, "and cannot you trust one of my reputation? You will be doing a good act, a retributive act; one that will have the blessing of Providence upon it."

"But why this secrecy? Why do you come to me instead of paying the debt yourself? Is she——"

"She is who she is," was the somewhat stern interruption. "You do not know her; no one here knows her. Will you do what I ask or must I turn to your companion who seems as ill as yourself?"

"I—I want to do it, sir. Five thousand dollars! Let me feel of the bills that represent so much."

There was a movement, and the sick and feeble voice rose again in a tone of ecstatic

delight. "And I need not worry any more about her feet without shoes and her pretty head without shelter. She will be a lady and go to school, and by and by can learn a trade and live respectably. Oh, thank God, sir! I know who I would like to have made her guardian."

"Then you consent?" cried the stranger, with a thrill of some strong feeling in his voice.

"I do, sir, and thank you; only you must be quick, for there is no knowing how soon the end may come." The stranger, who seemed to be equally apprehensive of the results of this strong excitement, raised himself upright and motioned to the doctor and the nurse.

"You will say nothing of our compact," he enjoined in a final whisper, as the two summoned ones approached. "Nor will you express surprise at the wording of the will or, indeed, at anything I may say."

"No," came in an almost undistinguishable murmur, and then there was silence, till the doctor and the nurse were within hearing, when the stranger said:

"Our friend here has a small matter of business on his mind. It has been my pleasure, as I perhaps intimated to you, to bring him a considerable sum of money which he had quite despaired of ever having paid him; and as for reasons he is not willing to communicate, he desires to bequeath a portion of it to a person not related to him, he naturally finds it necessary to leave a will. Foreseeing this, I had the draft of one drawn up, which, if agreeable to you, I will read to him in your presence."

The amazement in the nurse's eye gave way to a look of deference, and she bowed slightly. The doctor nodded his head, and both took their stand at the foot of the small cot. The man in the adjoining bed neither murmured nor moved. Had they looked at him, they would have doubtless thought his sleep was doing him but little good, for his pallor had increased and an icy sweat glistened on his forehead.

"Mr. Hazlitt's property," continued the stranger in a low and mechanical tone, "consists entirely of money. Is that not so?"

he asked, smiling upon the dazed but yet strangely happy face of the patient lying before him. "Namely, this roll of bills, amounting as you see to five thousand dollars, and this small package of banknotes, of which the amount is not stated, but of whose value he is probably aware. Are you willing," and he turned to the doctor, "to take charge of these valuables, and see that they are forthcoming at the proper time?"

The doctor bowed, glanced at his patient, and meeting his eager eye, took the roll of bills and the package, and putting them into his breast pocket, remarked, "I will have them placed in the safe deposit vaults to-morrow."

"Very well," cried the stranger; "that will be all right, will it not?" he asked, consulting in his turn the man before him.

Mr. Hazlitt, as they called him, gave him a short look, smiled again, and said: "You know best; anything, so that my Lucy gets her five thousand."

The stranger, straightening himself, asked if he could not have more light, at which the nurse brought a candle. Immediately the

stranger took a paper from under his cloak and opened it. The nurse held the candle and the stranger began to read :

The last will and testament of Abram Hazlitt of Chicago, Cook county, Illinois.

First : I direct all my just debts and funeral expenses to be paid.

Second : I give, devise, and bequeath to——

"Is your daughter's name Lucy, and is the sum you wish given her five thousand dollars exact?" asked the stranger, sitting down at the small table near by and taking out a pen from his pocket.

"Yes," was the feeble response, "five thousand dollars to Lucy Ellen, my only and much-beloved child."

The stranger rapidly wrote in the words, adding, "she lives in Chicago, I suppose."

It was the nurse who answered :

"She is in this hospital, too, sir ; but not for any mortal complaint. Time and care will restore her."

The stranger went on reading :

I give, devise, and bequeath to my only and much-loved child, Lucy Ellen of Chicago, Cook county, Illinois, the sum of five thousand dollars.

Second: I give, devise, and bequeath to——

"Did you say the name was Mary Earle, and that she lived in Hamilton, —— county, Massachusetts?" he interjected, looking inquiringly at the man whose sagacity he thus trusted.

"Yes, yes," was the hurried, almost faint answer. "You know, you know; go on quickly, for I 'm feeling very weak."

They gave him stimulants, while the stranger rapidly wrote in certain words, which he as rapidly read in what one listener thought to be a much relieved tone.

I give, devise, and bequeath to Mary Earle of Hamilton, —— county, Massachusetts, all my remaining property as found in the package of banknotes deposited in the safe deposit vaults of this city, in payment of an old debt to her father, and as an expression of my regret that my hitherto destitute circumstances have prevented me from sooner recognizing her claims upon me.

Third: I appoint Dr. Cusack of the Chicago General Hospital sole executor of this, my last will and testament.

Witness my hand this thirteenth day of April in the year eighteen hundred and ninety-two.

Signed, published, and declared by the testator to be his last will and testament, in our presence, who at his request and in his presence and in the presence of each other have subscribed our names hereto as witnesses on this thirteenth day of April, 1892.

"Does this paper express your wishes and all your wishes?" asked the stranger pausing. "Is there any change you would like made or is the will as it stands right?"

"Right! right!" came in more feeble tones from the fast sinking sufferer.

"Then if you will call in another witness, I will submit the paper to him to sign," said the stranger turning toward the doctor. "As executor you cannot act as witness."

The doctor turned to the nurse and a momentary consultation passed between them. Then she quietly withdrew, and in a few minutes returned with a man who from his

appearance evidently occupied some such position as watchman. The sick man was raised higher in his bed and a pen put in his hand.

"Mr. Hazlitt is about to sign his will," explained the stranger; and turning to the sick man, he put the formal question: "Is this paper which I here place before you, your last will and testament? And do you accept these two persons now before you as witnesses to your signing of the same?"

A feeble assent followed both these questions, whereupon the stranger put his finger on the place where the dying man was expected to write his name. As he did so a strange sensation seemed to affect every one present, for the men with an involuntary movement all raised their eyes to the ceiling upon which the stooping form of the stranger made such a weird shadow, while the nurse gave evident signs of momentary perturbation, which she as a woman of many experiences would doubtless have found it hard to explain even to herself.

A short silence followed, which was presently broken by the scratching of a pen. The

patient was writing his name, but how slowly! He seemed to be minutes in doing it. Suddenly he fell back, a smile of perfect peace lighting up his shrunken features.

"Lucy's future is assured," he murmured, and lost or seemed to lose all connection with the scene in which he had just played such an important part.

A deep sigh answered him. Whose? It had the sound of relief in it, a great soul-satisfying relief. Had the stranger uttered it? It would seem so, but his manner was too professional to be the cloak of so much emotion, or so it seemed to all eyes but one.

The witnesses' signatures were soon in place, and the stranger rose to go. As he did so his eyes flashed suddenly over his shoulder and rested for an instant on the man who occupied the neighboring cot. The movement was so quick that No. Thirteen had scarcely time to close his eyes undetected. Indeed, some glint of the half-hidden eyeball must have met the stranger's eye, for he turned quickly and bent over the seemingly unconscious man with a gaze of such intentness that it took all the

strength of what had once been called a most obstinate will for the man thus surveyed not to respond to it.

Suddenly the stranger thrust his hand out and laid it on the unknown sufferer's heart, and a slight smile crossed his features.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" were the words he dropped, cold and stinging, into the apparently deaf ear.

But the man's will was indomitable and an icy silence was the sole answer which the intruder received.

"I have still a thousand to give away," was whispered so close into his face that he felt the hot breath that conveyed it.

But even these words fell, or seemed to fall, upon ears of stony deafness, and the stranger rising, moved quietly away, saying as he did so, "This case here is on the mend. His heart has a very normal beat."

Some few more words were said, and he and his companion were left alone again with the nurse.

At three o'clock No. Twelve called feebly for some water; as the nurse returned from

giving it to him she felt her dress pulled slightly by a feeble hand. Turning to No. Thirteen she was astonished to see that his eyes were burning with quite an eager light.

"I could drink some broth," said he.

"Why, you are better!" she cried.

But he shook his head. "No," said he, "but—" The voice trailed off into a feeble murmur, but the eye continued bright. He was afraid to speak for fear his lips would frame aloud the words that he had been repeating to himself for the last two hours. "Mary Earle! Mary Earle, of Hamilton, —— county, Massachusetts."

He had found the interest which had been lacking to his recovery.

PART II.

THE MAN WITH THE DOG.

II.

HADLEY'S CAVE.

ON the first day of June, 1892, there could be seen on the highway near the small village of Hamilton, a dusty wanderer with a long beard and rough, unkempt hair. From the silver streaks in the latter, and from his general appearance and feeble walk, he had already passed the virile point of life and had entered upon, or was about to enter upon, the stage of decrepitude. And yet the eyes which burned beneath the gray and shaggy brows were strangely bright, and had an alertness of expression which contradicted the weary bend

of the head and the slow dragging of the rough-shod feet.

His dress was that of a farm laborer, and from the smallness of the bundle which he carried on a stick over his shoulder, he had evidently been out of work for some time and was as poor as he was old and helpless.

At the junction of the two roads leading to Leadington and Wells, he stopped and drew a long breath. Then he sat down on a huge stone in the cross of the roads and, drooping his head, gazed long and earnestly at the length of dusty road which separated him from the cluster of steeples and house roofs before him. Was he dreaming or planning, or was he merely weary? A sound at his side startled him. Turning his head, he saw a dog. It was a very lean one, and its attitude as it stood gazing into his face with wistful eyes, was one of entreaty.

"Come!" it seemed to say, and ran off a few steps. The tramp, for we can call him nothing else, though there was a dash of something like refinement in his look and manner, stared for a moment after the animal, then he slowly

rose. But he did not follow the dog. The disappointment of the latter was evident. Coming back to the man, he sniffed and pulled at his clothes, and cast such beseeching looks upward out of his all but human eyes that the man though naturally surly was touched at last and turned in the direction indicated by the dog.

"After all, why not?" he murmured, and strolled on after his now delighted guide, up one of the roads to a meadow terminating in an abrupt and rocky steep.

"Why am I such a fool?" he asked himself when half way across this stubbly field. But at the short bark of the dog and the irresistible wagging of the animal's tail, he stumbled on, influenced no doubt by some superstitious feeling which bade him regard the summons of this unusually sagacious beast as an omen he dared not disregard. At the foot of the rocks he, however, paused. Why should he climb them at the bidding of a dog? But his guide was imperative, and pulled at his trousers so energetically that he finally mounted a short distance, when to his surprise he came

upon a cave into the entrance of which the dog plunged with a short sharp cry of pleasure and satisfaction.

Hesitating to follow, the man stood for a moment gazing back upon the town and the stretch of lovely landscape before him. It was an outlook of great charm, but I doubt if he noticed its beauties. Some thought of an unpleasant and perplexing nature furrowed his brow, and it was with a start that he turned, when the dog, reissuing from the cave, renewed his blandishments, and by dint of bark and whine attempted to draw him into the opening before which he stood.

What was in hiding there? Curiosity bade him look, but a certain not unreasonable apprehension deterred him. He finally, however, overcame his fear, if fear it was, and followed the dog, that no sooner saw him start toward the entrance than he gave a leap of delight and bounded into the cave before him. In another moment the man had entered also and was looking around for the helpless or wounded human being whom he evidently expected to find.

But no such sight met his eyes. On the contrary, he saw nothing but an empty cave with here and there a sign of the place having been used as a domicile at a recent date. In one corner was a litter of boughs from which the covering had manifestly been roughly torn, and in the ledges overhead were to be seen spikes of wood, upon which utensils had doubtless been hung, for amid the *débris* of broken rock beneath lay an old tin pan with the handle broken off.

As there was nothing in this to interest the man he turned and kicked at the inoffensive beast who had lured him out of his path on such a fruitless errand. But the latter instead of resenting this harshness only renewed his previous antics, and finally succeeding by them in re-attracting the man's attention, led the way to a remote corner of the cave, where the shadows were thickest. Here he stood with his paws raised against the rocky sides, looking up over his head and then back at the man in a way which left no doubt as to his meaning.

He wanted the man to climb, and when the

man approaching saw the few rocky steps that had been hewn out of the wall, his curiosity was renewed and he lent himself to the effort, old as he was and tired with many a long hour of tramping in the summer sun.

Above him he perceived a dark hole, and into this he presently thrust his head, but the darkness which he encountered was so impenetrable that he would have instantly retreated had he not remembered the box of matches which kept guard with an old pipe in a certain pocket of his red flannel shirt. Taking out this box, he struck a match and, as soon as the first dazzling flash was over, perceived that he was in a small but well furnished room, stocked with provisions and containing many articles of domestic use. This so surprised him that he withdrew in some haste, though he would dearly have liked to have made some investigation into the old chest of drawers he saw there, and had one peep at least into the odd, long box which took up so much of the darkened space into which he had intruded.

The dog was waiting for him below and at

his reappearance leaped and bounded with delight, and then lay down on the floor of the cave with such an inviting wriggle of the tail that the man understood him at last. It was a lodging that the dog offered him, a lodging which had been occupied by a former master, and which the faithful creature still watched over and hungered in, as his appearance amply showed. The man, to whom a human being might have appealed in vain, was grimly touched by this benevolent action on the part of a dog, and stooping quickly, he gave him a short caress, after which he rose and stood hesitating for a moment, casting short glances behind him.

But the temptation, if it was such, to remain, did not hold him long, for presently he motioned to the dog to follow him, and issuing from the cave, began his weary tramp toward the town. The dog, with fallen tail and drooping head, trotted slowly after him. And this was the first adventure which met this man in the little town of Hamilton.

III.

THE YOUNG HEIRESS.

THAT night five men sat on the porch of the one tavern in Hamilton. Of these, one was the landlord, a spare, caustic New Englander who understood his business and left it to his wife to do the agreeable. Of the remaining four, two were the inevitable loungers to be found around all such places at nightfall, and the other two, wayfarers who had taken up lodgings for the night. The dog lying contentedly at the feet of one of these latter tells us who he was.

The talk was on local subjects and included more or less gossip. Who had started it? No one knew; but the least interested person in the group was apparently the man with the dog. He sat and smoked, because it was the hour for sitting and smoking, but he neither

talked nor listened,—that is, to all appearance —and when he laughed, as he occasionally did, it was more at some unexpected antic on the part of the dog than at anything which was said in his hearing. But he was old and nobody wondered.

The last subject under discussion was the engagement of a certain young lady to a New York medical student. "Which means, I take it, that Dr. Izard will not continue to have full swing here," observed one of the stragglers. "Folks say as how her people won't hear of her leaving home. So he 'll have to come to Hamilton."

"I sha'n't lend him my old body to experiment on, if he does," spoke up the surly landlord. "Dr. Izard is good enough for me."

"And for me. But the women folks want a change, they say. The doctor is so everlasting queer ; and then he 's away so much."

"That 's because he is so skilful that even the big bugs in Boston and New York too, I hear, want his opinion on their cases. He 's not to blame for that. Great honor, I say, not only to him but to all the town."

"Great honor, no doubt, but mighty inconvenient. Why, when my wife's sister was took the other night I run all the way from my house to the doctor's only to find the door closed and that everlasting placard up at the side: 'Gone out of town.' I say it 's a shame, I do, and no other doctor to be found within five miles."

"You ought to live in Boston. There they have doctors enough."

"Yet they send for ours."

"Do you know," another voice spoke up, "that I had rather go sick till morning, or have one of my folk's sick, than take that road up by the churchyard after ten o'clock at night. I think it 's the gloomiest, most God-forsaken spot I ever struck in all my life. To think of a doctor living next door to a graveyard. It 's a trifle too suggestive, I say."

"I would n't care about that if he was n't so like a graveyard himself. I declare his look is like a hollow vault. If he was n't so smart I 'd 'a' sent for the Wells doctor long ago. I hate long white faces, myself, no matter how handsome they are, and when he touches me

with that slender cold hand of his, the shivers go all over me so that he thinks I am struck with a chill. And so I am, but not with a natural one, I vow. If we lived in the olden times and such a man dared come around the death-beds of honest people such as live in this town, he 'd have been burnt as a wizard."

"Come, I won't hear such talk about a neighbor, let alone a man who has more than once saved the lives of all of us. He 's queer; but who is n't queer? He lives alone, and cooks and sleeps and doctors all in one room, like the miser he undoubtedly is, and won't have anything to do with chick or child or man or woman who is not sick, unless you except the village's *protégée*, Polly Earle, whom everybody notices and does for. But all this does not make him wicked or dangerous or uncanny even. That is, to those who used to know him when he was young."

"And did you?"

"Wa'al, I guess I did, and a handsomer man never walked Boston streets, let alone the lanes of this poor village. They used to say in those days that he thought of marrying, but

he changed his mind for some reason, and afterward grew into the kind of man you see. Good cause, I 've no doubt, for it. Men like him don't shut themselves up in a cage for nothing."

"But——"

"Don't let us talk any more about the doctor," cried the lodger who did not have a dog. "You spoke of a little girl whom everybody does for. Why is that? The topic ought to be interesting."

The landlord, who had talked more than his wont, frowned and filled his pipe, which had gone out. "Ask them fellers," he growled; "or get my wife into a corner and ask her. She likes to spin long stories; I don't."

"Oh, I don't care about asking anybody," mumbled the stranger, who was a sallow-faced drummer with a weak eye and a sensual mouth. "I only thought——"

"She is n't for any such as you, if that 's what you mean," volunteered the straggler, taking up the burden of the talk. "She has been looked after by the village because her case was a hard one. She was an only child,

and when she was but four her mother died, after a long and curious illness which no one understood, and three days after, her father—" The dog yelped. As no one was near him but his master, he must have been hurt by that master, but how, it was impossible to understand, for neither had appeared to move.

"Well, well," cried the sallow young man, "her father——"

"Disappeared. He was last seen at his wife's funeral; the next day he was not to be found anywhere. That was fourteen years ago, and we know no more now than then what became of him."

"And the child?"

"Was left without a soul to look after it. But the whole village has taken her in charge and she has never suffered. She has even been educated,—some say by Dr. Izard, but for this I won't vouch, for he is a perfect miser in his way of living, and I don't think he would trouble himself to help anybody, even a poor motherless child."

"Well, if he has spent a penny for her in

the past, I don't think he will be called upon to spend any in the future. I heard yesterday that she has come into a pretty property, and that, too, in a very suspicious way."

"What 's that? You have? Why did n't you tell us so before? When a man has news, I say he ought to impart it, and that without any ifs and ands."

"Well, I thought it would keep," drawled the speaker, drawing back with an air of importance as all the *habitués* of the place pressed upon him, and even Mrs. Husted, the landlady, stepped out of her sitting-room to listen.

"Wa'al, it won't," snarled the landlord. "News, like baked potatoes, must be eaten hot. Where did you hear this about Polly Earle, and what do you mean by suspicious?"

"I mean that this money, and they do say it 's a pretty sum, came to her by will, and that the man who left it was a perfect stranger to her, someone she never heard of before, of that I 'll be bound. He said in his will that he left all this money in payment of an old debt to her father, but that 's all bosh.

Ephraim Earle got all the money that was owing to him two weeks before he vanished out of this town, and I say——"

"No matter what you say," broke in the crabbed landlord. "She 's had money left her, and now she 'll get a good husband, and make a show in the village. I 'm glad on it, for one. She 's sung and danced and made merry on nothing long enough. Let her try a little responsibility now, and return some of the favors she has received."

"Did you hear how much money it was?" timidly asked an old man who had just joined the group.

"It was just the same amount as was paid Ephraim Earle for his invention a few days before we saw the last of him."

"Lord-a-mercy!"

"And which——"

"Now this is too interesting for anything," exclaimed a female voice from a window overhead. "Twenty thousand dollars, really? What a romance. I must run and see Polly this minute."

"Stop her!" came in gutteral command from the landlord to his wife.

"And why should I stop her?" asked that good woman, with a jolly roll of her head. "Instead of stopping her, I think I will go with her. But do let us hear more about it first. What was the name of the man who left her this splendid fortune?"

"Abram Hazlitt. Somebody who lived out west."

From the looks that flew from one to the other and from the doubtful shakes of the head visible on every side, this was, as the speaker had declared, an utterly unknown name. The interest became intense.

"I always thought there was something wrong about Ephraim's disappearance. No man as good as he would have left a child like that of his own free will."

"What! do you think this man Hazlitt had anything to do——"

"Hush, hush."

The monition came from more than one pair of lips; and even the man with the dog looked up. A young lady was coming down the street.

"There she is now."

"She 's coming here."

"No; more likely she 's on her way to tell the doctor of her good luck."

"Look, she has the same old smile."

"And the same dress."

"Wa'al she 's pretty, anyhow."

"And such a sunbeam!"

Yelp! went the dog again. His master had trod on his tail for the second time. Meanwhile the cause of all this excitement had reached the walk in front of the house. Though she was tripping along in a merry fashion which was all her own, she stopped as she met Mrs. Husted's eye, and, calling her down, whispered something in her ear. Then with a backward nod the young girl passed on, and everyone drew a long breath. There was something so satisfactory to them all in her ingenuous manner and simple expression of youthful delight.

She was a slight girl, and to those who had seen her every day for the last dozen years she was simply prettier than usual, but to the two or three strangers observing her she was a vision of madcap beauty that for the moment

made every other woman previously seen forgotten. Her face, which was heart-shaped and fresh as a newly-opened rose, was flushed with laughter, and the dimples which came and went with every breath so distracted the eye that it was not till she had turned her lovely countenance aside that one remembered the violet hues in her heavily-lashed eyes and the hints of feeling which emanated from them. That, with all the dignities of her new-born heirship upon her, she swung a white sunbonnet on her delicate forefinger was characteristic of the girl. The hair thus revealed to sight was of a glistening chestnut, whose somewhat rumpled curls were deliciously in keeping with the saucy poise of the unquiet head. Altogether a decided gleam of sunshine, made all the more conspicuously bright from the hints just given of the tragic history of her parents and the shadows surrounding the very gift which had called up all this pleasure into her face.

"What did she say?" whispered more than one voice as the landlady came slowly back.

"She invited me to visit her, and hinted that

she had something to tell me," was the somewhat important reply.

"And when are you going?" asked one more eager than the rest.

"I may go back with her when she returns from Dr. Izard's," was the cool and consequential response. Evidently the landlady had been raised in her own estimation by the notice given her by this former little waif.

"I wonder," someone now ventured, "if she is going to buy the big house over the doctor's office. I noticed that the windows were open to-day."

"Pshaw, and her father's house lying idle?"

"Her father's house! Good gracious, would you have the child go there?"

"You make the chills run over me."

"Nobody would go into that house with her. It has n't been opened in fourteen years."

"The more shame," growled the landlord.

"She 'll never have anything to do with that. I 've seen her run by it myself, as if the very shadow it cast was terrifying to her."

"Yet folks thought it was a cozy home when Ephraim took his young wife there. I remem-

ber, myself, the brass andirons in the parlor and the long row of books in the big hall upstairs. To think that those books have never been opened these fourteen years, nor the floors trod on, nor the curtains drawn back! I declare, it 's the most creepy thing of the whole affair."

"And how do you know that the floor has n't been walked on, nor the curtains drawn, since we took the child out from her desolate corner in the old bed-room upstairs?" suggested another voice in an odd, mysterious tone.

"Because the doors were locked and the keys put where no one in the town could get at 'em. We thought it best; there was death on the walls everywhere, and the child had no money to be brought up in any such a grand way as that."

"Folks as I mean don't need keys," murmured the other under his breath. But the suggestion, if it were such, was immediately laughed down.

"You 're a fool, Jacob; we 're in the nineteenth century now, the era of electric lights and trolley cars."

"I know; I know; but I've seen more than once on a dark night the shifting of a light behind those drawn curtains, and once——"

But the laughter was against him and he desisted, and another man spoke up—the lodger with the sallow face: "Why did n't they sell the old place if the child was left as poor as you say?"

"Why, man, its owner might be living. Ephraim Earle only disappeared, you know, and might have returned any day. Leastwise that is what we thought then. Now, we no longer expect it. I wonder who 'll act as her guardian."

"She 's of age; she don't need no guardian."

"Well, it 's a precious mystery, the whole thing. I wonder if the police won't see something in it?"

"Bah, police! They had the chance at the thing fourteen years ago. And what did they do with it? Nothing."

"But now there 's a clue. This man Hazlitt knew what became of Ephraim Earle, or why

did he leave that very same amount to his daughter?"

"Lor' knows. She 's a taking minx and perhaps——".

"Well, perhaps——"

"Hazlitt was n't his name, don't you see?"

This new theory started fresh talk and much excited reasoning, but as it was of the most ignorant sort, it is scarcely worth our while to record it. Meanwhile the twilight gave way to darkness and Polly Earle failed to reappear. When it was quite dark, the stragglers separated, and then it was seen that the man with the dog had fallen asleep in his chair.

Someone strove to wake him.

"Come, come, friend," said he; "you 'll be getting the rheumatiz if you don't look out. This is n't the right kind of air to sleep in."

The old wayfarer yawned, opened his strange, uneasy eyes, and hobbling to his feet looked lazily up and down the street.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"Nine o'clock," shouted someone.

"Give me a drink, then, and I and my dog will take a walk." And he drew out a worn

wallet, from which he drew a dime, which he handed in through the open window to the now busy landlord.

"Hot," he croaked, "I 've got chilly sitting out here in the dew."

The glass was handed him, and he drank it off with the ease of an accustomed hand.

"I 'll be back before you lock up," said he, and stepped down into the street, followed by the dog.

"Seems to me I 've seen that dog before," remarked someone.

"Why, don't you know him? That 's old Piper, the dead hermit's dog. I wonder how this fellow got hold of him."

IV.

DR. IZARD.

THE tramp, who was, as you have seen, not without some small means to make himself respected, paused for a moment in front of the tavern before deciding what direction he would take. Then he went east, or, to make matters clearer to my reader, followed the direction young Polly Earle had taken an hour or so before.

Being bent and old he walked slowly, but as the tavern from which he had emerged was near the end of the street, it was not long before he came upon the big church at the corner, beyond which was the open country and circling highroad.

"They spoke of a graveyard," murmured he, pausing and gazing about him with eyes which seemed to have lost none of their pene-

tration, however bent his figure or aged his face. "Ah! I think I see it!" And he rambled on in the darkness till he came to a picket fence. But this fence enclosed a dwelling-house, whose large and imposing bulk rose in deepest shadow beyond him, and he had to walk several rods farther before he came to the spot of glimmering headstones and drooping willows. A faint moon lent a ghostly light to the place, and as he stopped and bent his head over the intervening wall, weird glimpses were given him of snowy shafts and rounded hillocks, which may have accounted for the length of time he clung there without movement or sound.

But finally the dog whining at his heels, or the gleam of a light shining in the distance, recalled him to himself, and he moved, taking the direction of that light, though it led him over the cemetery wall and across such of the graves as lay along the border of the yard adjoining the large house of which I have previously spoken. The dog, who had not left him a moment since he joined him at the cave, shrank as he climbed the wall, and the old

man took his course alone, treading as softly as he could, but yet making some noise as a broken twig snapped under his foot or he pressed down some tiny aspiring bush in his rude advance.

He was making for the light which shone from the window near the ground in the huge side of the great and otherwise unilluminated house he had passed a few minutes before. He had expected to be met by a fence like the one in front, but to his surprise he soon saw that the graveyard pressed close up to the house, and that there was a monument not ten yards from the very window he was approaching. He had paused at this monument, and was vainly trying to read the inscription which was cut deeply into the side turned toward the moon, when he heard a sudden sound, and, looking toward the house, saw that a door had opened in the blank side of the wall, and that the light had shifted from the window to this open square, where it was held high above the head of a remarkable looking man who was looking directly his way.

Convinced that this was Dr. Izard, he held

his breath, and slunk as much into the shadow of the shaft as possible. Meanwhile he stared at the picture presented to his notice, and noted every outline of the noble head and small but finely proportioned form, that filled the illuminated gap before him. The face he could not see, but the attitude was eloquent, and conveyed so vividly an expression of strained listening and agitated doubt, that this by no means careless observer felt that his step had been heard, and that something more than common curiosity had drawn the doctor to the spot.

A sudden sense of his position among the graves, or the chill imparted by his close contact with the stone shaft against which he had flung himself, made the aged wanderer shiver, but his emotion, however occasioned, did not last long, for with a sigh that could be plainly heard across the short space, Dr. Izard withdrew his head and closed the door, leaving nothing to be seen in the dim blackness of the houseside but the one square of light which had previously attracted the stranger's attention.

With careful step and bated breath, the latter left the tomb by which he had sought refuge, and advanced to this same wall, along which he crept till he reached this uncurtained window. A glimpse of the interior was what he wanted, but, as he stopped to listen, he found that he was likely to obtain more than this, for plainly to be heard in the almost death-like quiet, came the sound of two voices conversing, and he knew, perhaps by instinct, perhaps by ready reasoning, that they were the voices of the doctor and the pretty new heiress, Polly Earle.

To listen might have been a temptation to any man, but to this one it was almost a necessity. His first desire, however, was to see what was before him, and so, with more skill than one would expect, he bent a branch of the vine swaying about him, and, from behind its cover, peered into the shining panes that opened so invitingly beside him.

The first thing he saw was the room with its shelves upon shelves of books, piled high to the ceiling. As it answered the triple purpose of doctor's office, student's study, and a mis-

anthrope's cell, it naturally presented an anomalous appearance, which was anything but attractive at first sight. Afterward, certain details stood out, and it became apparent that those curious dangling things which disfigured the upper portion of the room belonged entirely to the medical side of the occupant's calling, while the mixture of articles on the walls, some beautiful, but many of them grotesque if not repellant, bespoke the man of taste whose nature has been warped by solitude. A large door painted green filled up a considerable space of the wall on the left, but judging from the two heavy bars padlocked across it, it no longer served as a means of communication with the other parts of the house. On the contrary it had been fitted from top to bottom with shelves, upon which were ranged a doctor's usual collection of phials, boxes, and surgical appliances, with here and there a Chinese image or an Indian god. A rude settle showed where he slept at night, and on the table in the middle of the room, a most incongruous litter of books, trinkets, medicines, clothing, sewing materials, and chemical

apparatus proclaimed the fact, well known in the village, that no woman ever set foot in the place, save such as came for medical advice or on some such errand as had drawn hither the pretty Polly.

At the table and in full view of the peering intruder sat the genius of the place, Dr. Izard. His back was to the window and he was looking up at Polly, who stood near, twirling as usual her sunbonnet round her dainty forefinger. It was his profile, therefore, which the curious wayfarer saw, but this profile was so fine and yet so characteristic that it immediately imprinted itself upon the memory like a silhouette and the observer felt that he had known it always. Yet it was not till one had been acquainted with the doctor long that all the traits of his extraordinary countenance became apparent. Its intelligence, its sadness, its reserve and the beauty which gave to all these qualities a strange charm which was rather awe-inspiring than pleasurable, struck the mind at once, but it was not till after months of intercourse that one saw that the spell he invariably created about him was not due to these

obvious qualities but to something more subtle and enigmatic, something which flashed out in his face at odd times or fell from his voice under the strain of some unusual emotion, which while it neither satisfied the eye nor the ear, created such a halo of individuality about the man that dread became terror or admiration became worship according to the mental bias of the person observant of him.

In age he was nearer fifty than forty, and in color dark rather than light. But no one ever spoke of him as young or old, light or dark. He was simply Dr. Izard, the pride and the dread of the village, the central point of its intellectual life, on whose eccentricities judgment was suspended because through him fame had come to the village and its humble name been carried far and wide.

Polly, who feared nobody, but who had for this man, as her rather unwilling benefactor, a wholesome respect, was looking down when the stranger first saw her. The smile which was never long absent from her lips lingered yet in the depths of the dimple that was turned toward the doctor, but the rest of her face

showed emotion and a hint of seriousness which was by no means unbecoming to her poetic features.

"You are very good," she was saying. "I have often wondered why you were so good to such a little flyaway as I am. But I shall surely remember all you have said and follow your advice as nearly as possible.'

There was unexpected coldness in the doctor's reply:

"I have advised nothing but what any friend of yours must subscribe to. The woman with whom you are staying is a good woman, but the home she can give you is no longer suitable for a girl who has come, as you say you have, into possession of considerable property. You must find another; and since the house over our heads is a good one, I have ventured to offer it to you for a sum which your man of business certainly will not regard as high, considering its advantages of size and location."

"By location do you mean its close proximity to the graveyard?" she inquired, with a *naïve* inclination of her coquettish head. "I

should say, myself, though I never fear anything, that its location is against it."

His eye, which had wandered from hers, came back with a stern intentness.

"Since I have lived here for twenty years with no other outlook than the graves you see, I cannot be said to be a good judge of the matter. To me the spot has become a necessity, and if you should make the arrangement I suggest, it must be with the understanding that this room is to be reserved for my use as long as I live, for I could never draw a free breath elsewhere."

"Nor would anyone wish you to," said she. "This solitary room, with its dangling skulls and queer old images, its secrecy and darkness, and the graves pressing up almost to your window, seems a part of Dr. Izard. I could not imagine you in a trim office with a gig at the door and a man to drive it. No, it would rob us of half our faith in you, to see you enjoying life like other folks. You must stay here if only because my mother, lying over there in her solitary grave, would be lonely were your face to fail to appear

every night and morning in your open doorway."

Her hand, which had paused in its restless action, pointed over her shoulder to the silent yard without. The physician's eye followed it, and the words of reproof died upon his tongue.

"You think me frivolous," she cried. "Well, so I am, at times. But *you* make me think; and if this sudden accession to fortune fills me with excitement and delight, the sight of you sitting here, and the nearness of my mother's tomb, gives me some sober thoughts too, and—and—Dr. Izard, will you tell me one thing? Why do people stare when they hear the exact amount of the money left me? It is not because it is so large; for some say it is anything but a large fortune. Is it—" she hesitated a little, probably because it was always hard to talk to Dr. Izard—"for the reason that it is so near the sum my father was said to have carried away with him, when he left me so suddenly?"

The wind was fluttering the vines, and the doctor turned his head to look that way.

When he glanced back he answered quietly, but with no irritation in his voice:

"It is hard to tell what causes the stare of ignorant people. What was the amount which has been left you? I do not think you have mentioned the exact figure."

"Twenty thousand dollars," she whispered. "Is n't it splendid,—a lordly fortune, for such a poor girl as I am?"

"Yes," he acquiesced, "yes." But he seemed struck just as others had been who heard it.

"And was not that just what was paid papa by the French government just before mamma died?"

"I have heard it so said," was the short reply.

"And don't you know?" she asked.

The pout on her lips bespoke the spoiled child, but her little hands were trembling, and he seemed to see only that.

"Polly,"—he spoke harshly, for he did not like young girls, or women at all for that matter,—"I knew many things which I have let slip from my memory. When your father and

I were young we were more or less intimate, being both of us students and ambitious of doing something worth while in this world. But after his disappearance and the unfortunate surmises to which it gave rise, I made a business of forgetting any confidential communications with which he may have entrusted me, and I advise you not to stir up old griefs by driving me to recall them now."

"But you were my mother's physician and saw my father just before he went away."

"Yes."

"And did he have twenty thousand dollars in money? They say so, but it seems incredible to me, who only remember my father as looking worried and poor."

"Twenty thousand dollars was paid him two weeks before your mother died."

"And he carried all that away with him and never left a dollar to his little motherless child? Oh, I know that some people say he was foully dealt with and that it was not of his own free will that he left me to the mercies of the town. But I never believed that. I have always thought of him as alive, and many is

the night I have waked up crying—Oh, I can cry at night and in the darkness, if I do laugh all day when the sun shines—because I dreamt he was enjoying himself in foreign lands while I—" she stopped, looking inquiringly at Dr. Izard, and he, startled, looked inquiringly at her, then for the second time he rose up, and taking the light, went out to search up and down the ghostly waste before him, for what he rather felt than knew was near.

"Oh, how late it is getting!" cried the little maiden, peering over his shoulder. "Did you think you heard someone sigh? I thought I did, but who would come creeping up to this spot? Do you know," she exclaimed, drawing him in just as he was about to turn his attention to the side of the house against which they stood, "that I believe it 's that horrid green door which gives people the shivers when they come here. Why is it there and what is on the other side of it that you bar it up like that?"

The doctor, lifting his abstracted gaze, stared at the door for a moment, then turned moodily away. "It was the old way of going

upstairs," he remarked. "Why should n't I bar it, since I have no further use for the rest of the house?"

"But its color," she persisted; "why do you not paint it white?"

"When I fit up my den for a bride, then I will," he retorted, and the audacious little thing became dumb on this subject, though she showed no inclination for dropping the other.

"Dear Dr. Izard," she pursued, "I know I ought to be going home, but I have something more to ask, and it is n't always that you allow me to speak to you. Our house—you know what I mean, my father's and mother's house, —is it really haunted, and is that why it is shut up, even from me?"

"Do you want to go into it, Polly?"

"No—and yet I have sometimes thought I should like to. It must be full of relics of my parents, and if it has not been disturbed since my father went away, why, I might almost see the prints of his feet on the floors, and the pressure of his form in the old lounges and chairs."

"You are too imaginative!" cried the doctor. "They will have to marry you to some practical man."

She flushed, drew back and seemed on the point of uttering some violent protest or indignant reproach, but instead of that she returned to the original topic.

"I should like to hear from your lips, which never exaggerate or add the least bit of romance to anything you say, just the story of my father's departure and that sudden shutting up of the house. I think I ought to know now that I am a grown woman and have money of my own."

"Will you go, after I have told you all that there is to know?" he asked, with just a touch of impatience in his naturally severe tone.

"Yes," she laughed, irresistibly moved by his appearance of ill-nature. "I won't stay one minute longer than you wish me to. Only," she added, with the sobriety more in accordance with the theme they were discussing, "do make the whole thing clear to me. I have heard so many stories and all of them so queer."

He frowned, and his face underwent an indescribable change.

"You are a silly slip of a girl and I have a mind to turn you out of the house at once. But," and his eyes wandered away to his books, "your curiosity is legitimate and shall be satisfied. Only not here," he suddenly cried, "I will tell you as we walk toward your home."

"Or in the graveyard outside," she murmured. "I am not afraid of the place with you near me. Indeed, I think I should like to hear my mother's story, standing by her tomb."

"*You would!*" The doctor, astonished, agitated almost, by this untoward sentiment uttered by lips he had only seen parted in laughter, rose, and leaning on the table looked over it at her, with eyes whose effect only was visible to the straining pair without. "Well, you shall have your wish. I will tell you her story, that is, as much as I know of it, standing by her grave without." And with a grim smile, he took up his hat and stepped quickly before her toward the door. She followed

him, with an eager gesture, and in a minute their two shadows could be dimly seen in the moonlight falling over the face of that very shaft behind which the stranger had taken refuge an hour or so before. The vines that swayed about the window ceased their restless rustling and seemed to cling with heavier shadow than usual to the dismal wall.

"Your father," said the doctor, "was a man of one idea, but that idea was a valuable one and it paid its projector well. The invention which he conceived, perfected, and made practical, was an important one, suited to large governmental undertakings and meeting the wants of France especially. It was bought, as I have said, from your father for the sum of twenty thousand dollars. But this good fortune, while deserved, had not come early, and your mother, who had been overburdened in her youth, was on her deathbed when the favorable news came. It comforted her, but it almost maddened your father, if I may judge from the frenzied expressions he used in my hearing. He did not touch the money, and when she died he locked himself up in a room,

from which he only emerged to attend her funeral. This I tell you that you may see that his paternal instinct was not as great as his conjugal one, or he would not have forgotten you in his grief. Did you speak?"

"No, no; but it is gloomy here, after all; let us go on into the highway."

But the man clinging to the wall was not forced to move. The doctor did not heed her entreaty, or if he did he ignored it, for his voice went coldly and impassively on: "The night after your mother was buried, your father was seen looking from one of the windows of his house. The next morning he was missing. That is all I can tell you, Polly. No one knows any more than that."

"But was n't there somebody in the house besides himself? Where was I?"

"Oh, you were there, and an old woman who had been looking after you in your mother's illness. But you were too young to realize anything, and the woman—she has since died—had nothing to say, but that she was sure she heard your father go out."

"And the money?"

"Went with him."

"Oh, I have heard it all before," came after a moment's silence, in sharp and plaintive tones. "But I was in hopes you could tell me something different, something new. Did they look for my father as I would have done had I been old enough to understand?"

"I headed the search myself, Polly; and later the police from Boston came down, and went through the town thoroughly. But they met with no results."

"And now a stranger leaves me twenty thousand dollars! Dr. Izard, I should like to know something about that stranger. He died in the Chicago Hospital, I am told."

"I will make inquiries."

"If—if he had anything to do with my father's disappearance——"

"You will never know it; the man is dead."

A silence followed these few words, during which the agitated breathing of the young girl could be heard. Then her quivering voice rose in the impatient cry: "Yes, yes; but it would be such a relief to know the truth. As

it is, I am always thinking that each stranger I see coming into town is he. Not that it makes me timid or melancholy; nothing could do that, I think; but still I 'm not quite happy, nor can this money make me so while any doubts remain as to my father's fate."

"I cannot help you," the doctor declared. "For fourteen years you have borne your burden, little one, and time should have taught you patience. If I were in a position like yours I would not allow old griefs to fret me. I should consider that a man who had been missing most of my lifetime was either dead or so indifferent that I ran but little chance of seeing him again. I myself do not think there is the least likelihood of your ever doing so. Why then not be happy?"

"Well, I will," she sighed. "I 'm sure it 's not my nature to be otherwise. But something either in these dismal trees, or in yourself or in myself makes me almost gloomy to-night. I feel as if a cloud hung over me. Am I very foolish, doctor, and will you be taking me back to the office to give me a dose

of some bitter, black stuff to drive away the horrors? I had rather you would give me a fatherly word. I 'm so alone in the world, for all my friends."

He may have answered this appeal by some touch or sympathetic move, but if he did, the listener was not near enough to catch it. There was a rustling where they stood and in another instant the bare head of the young girl was visible again in the moonlight.

"I think I will be going home," said she, and turned towards the gateway. The doctor followed her and together they left the cemetery and entered the high-road. When the sound of their voices had died away in the distance, a deep and heavy shadow separated itself from the side of the house near the window and resolving itself again into the image of the man through whose ears we have listened to the broken dialogue we have endeavored to transcribe, took up its stand before the still lighted window and for several minutes studied the peculiar interior most diligently. Then it drew off, and sliding down the path which followed the side of the house, emerged

upon the road and took its own course to the village.

Something which he did not see and something which he did not hear, took place at the other end of the town before a cheerfully lighted mansion. Dr. Izard and Polly had traversed the length of the street, and had nearly reached the cottage in which she was at present living, when the former felt the little hand now thrust confidingly into his arm, flutter and shift a trifle. As the girl had regained her spirits and was now chatting in quite a merry way upon indifferent topics, he looked up to see what it was that had affected her, and saw nothing save the lights of the Unwin place and a figure which must have been that of young Unwin sitting on the shadowy veranda. As he had reasons of his own for not liking to pass this house, he stopped and glanced at the young girl inquiringly. She had ceased speaking and her head was hanging so low that the curls dropped against her cheek, hiding her eyes and the expression of her mouth.

"I think," she whispered, "if you don't mind, that I will walk on the other side of you.

It is very late for me to be out, even with you, and Clarke——"

The doctor, drawing in his breath, turned his full face on her and stood so long gazing into her drooping countenance that she felt frightened and attempted to move on. Instantly he responded to her wish and they passed the house with quick and agitated steps, but when the shadows of the next block had absorbed them, they both paused as it were simultaneously, and the doctor said with something more than his usual feeling in his thin, fine voice, "Do you care for Clarke Unwin, little one?"

Her answer struck him.

"Do I care for breath, for life? He has been both to me ever since I could remember anything. And now he cares for me."

The doctor, lost in some overwhelming dream or thought, did not answer her for several minutes. Then he suddenly lifted her face by its dainty chin, and in a deep, controlled tone, totally different from the one he had used a short time before, he solemnly remarked:

"For fourteen years I have taken an interest in you and done for you what I have done for nobody else in the town. I hope that my care has made a good girl of you, and that under all your fanciful ways and merry antics there hides a true woman's heart."

"I don't know," she whispered. "I know that I would rather give up my fortune than one little memory connected with these last three weeks."

"And he—he loves you? You are sure of it, little one?"

The lift of her head was eloquent; the doctor wished he could see her face, but the darkness was too thick for that.

"May Heaven bless you!" faltered on his tongue; but the words were too unusual to the ascetic's cold lips for them to pass into speech, and the girl thought his manner more distant and unsympathetic than common.

"It is a secret I have told you," she murmured, and being then within a few steps of her own gate, she slid from his grasp and vanished in the darkness.

He, with a sigh that seemed to rend the icy

bonds which years of repression had bound about his breast, remained for a moment with his head bent, gazing on the ground at his feet. Then he drew himself up, and passed quickly back over the road he had come.

V.

NOCTURNAL WANDERINGS.

THE wanderer, of whose name even the landlord at the tavern seemed uncertain, passed some curious days after this. Upon the plea of wanting work, he visited house after house in the village, staying in each one as long as he was made welcome. Though no talker, he seemed to like to have talk going on around him, and if he sometimes went to sleep over it, he was forgiven by the simple and credulous inhabitants on account of his old age and seeming decrepitude. In one house he was given breakfast, in another dinner, but in none did he find work, though he assured everybody that he was very good in the field, notwithstanding the unfortunate curvature of his back.

It was not an uncommon thing in Hamilton

for men to pass from house to house in this way, and he was little noted, but if anyone had been curious enough to watch his eye they would have observed that it had a remarkably penetrating power, and that but little escaped its notice. Another thing that would also have been noticed was the curious look of recognition which would suddenly creep into his eyes, as if he saw some of these things for the second time; and if anyone had walked near enough to him to listen as well as watch, he would have heard a name drop from his lips now and then as he walked up the phlox-bordered walk of some humble garden, or stopped at the back door of one of the more pretentious mansions on the main street.

Another thing: When he had done this, when he had uttered in his odd, musing way, at the threshold of a house, the name of Fisher, Hutton, Brown, Unwin, or what not, he invariably managed in some way, either slyly or by bold question, to ascertain if this name really belonged to the family then residing there. If it did, he nodded his head complacently. If it did not, he frowned as if

disappointed in his memory or whatever it was that had played him false.

At one place he showed conclusively that he had been in the house before, though no one seemed keen enough to detect the fact. He was passing down a hall, when he turned to the right and came plumb up against a wall. This was where there had formerly been a door of egress, but a change which had been made some ten years back in the inner arrangement of the house had placed it farther on, and his face showed surprise when he noted it, though the expression was speedily suppressed. Again at the Fishers' he was very careful to sit in the deep shadow, and though he eagerly drank in all that was said, he himself made no remark after his first appeal for work. The Fishers were old neighbors of the Earles, and it was with them that Polly was living.

In the afternoon he found himself at the eastern end of the town near the church. As he noticed the venerable building he seemed to call to mind his experiences of the night before, for he glanced eagerly toward the cemetery, and finally turned his steps in that

direction, saying quietly to himself, "Let 's see how it looks by daylight."

The street, which takes a sharp turn at this point, was headed by the stately house whose dim columns and embowering trees had so struck the wanderer's attention the night before. Seen by daylight it was less mysterious in appearance but fully as imposing, though there were signs of neglect on its painted front and solitary balconies, which spoke of long disuse as a dwelling. It had the name of Izard engraved on the tarnished door-plate.

"Let me see," mused the tramp, leaning upon one of the old-fashioned gate-posts guarding the entrance, "I should remember how the house looks inside; I was here to a ball once when we were all young folks together. It was a fine old dwelling then, and Mrs. Izard, who always said she could remember Martha Washington, looked like a queen in it." Lifting his head, he glanced up at the pillared front. "There was a large double drawing-room on this side," he murmured, "with a big-figured carpet on the floor and

panelled paper on the walls. I think I could remember the very tints if I tried, for I sat that night for full ten minutes staring at it, while Lillie Unwin chattered nonsense in my ear, and—" the rest was lost in his long, dishevelled beard, which was much too gray to be worn by any contemporary of Dr. Izard.

"On the left," he presently proceeded, "was the library, with one or two windows looking out upon the cemetery, which was then a respectable distance off; and down the hall, which was wide enough to dance a Virginia reel in, there hung a map of the Holy Land, with one corner torn off. I wonder if it is hanging there still, and if I can remember which corner was lacking." He mused a minute with a sour smile. "Something must be pardoned in one who has been gone fourteen years," he murmured. "I cannot remember whether it was the left or the right-hand corner." Shutting his eyes, he leaned his head again on the post, while short, broken sentences issued by fits and starts from amid his beard as he brooded over the past.

"Under the big front staircase,—I remember it well,—there was a smaller circular one, which went down to a certain green door: the same one I noticed in the doctor's office, though there was no office then,—only a rectangular porch. He must have had the office built in since I left the town, for he used to see his patients in the library. Now, how did that porch look? It was broad and low, and raised but a step or two above the ground. There were two pillars in the opening toward the graveyard, similar to the big columns in front, but smaller and set further apart. At one end was a wooden seat built in the wood-work, and at the other a green door, the same as that seen in the doctor's room now. Will these details answer for one recollection? I think they will. And now for a glimpse of that shaft."

Lifting his head from the gate-post, he picked his way through the tangled weeds to the little gate on the highway which led directly to the doctor's office. Entering, he approached the tombstone against which he had leaned the night before, and heedless of pass-

ers-by, took up his stand before it and began reading the inscription.

SACRED

TO THE MEMORY

OF

HULDAH EARLE.

Born December Third, 1854.

Died August Ninth, 1878.

"I wonder who put up this monument," he muttered, and shuddered slightly as he recalled the chilliness of the stone against which he had pressed his breast the night before. But the emotion was but transitory, and he was soon surveying the small square window through whose panes the one light had shone on the previous night. It was near the office door, and was surrounded, as he had so gratefully experienced at that time, by a thick-leaved trumpet-vine, whose long and swaying branches recalled to him the anxious moment when the doctor had stepped to the door, drawn by some

sound he had made in his curiosity and interest. Just now a curtain hung before the window, sure sign that the doctor was within ; but he did not heed this, possibly because he did not understand the signal, and remained where he was, musing on the past, till the steps of some advancing visitor advised him that he might better indulge his thoughtful mood in a less conspicuous place, and in a solitude not so likely to be invaded by curious eyes.

The dog which had joined him at his first appearance in town continued to be his constant companion. All day this faithful animal followed him, and when night came, they went together into the small attic chamber which was the only room in the house he could afford to pay for. But one journey which the man took was not shared by the dog. It took place at midnight and in the following mysterious way :

He had noticed by a minute inspection of the roof stretching below his one small window that by a few daring steps down the first incline one might reach a ledge from which descent to the ground would be easy. It was a

path which might be taken with safety by a young man or a still vigorous middle-aged man. But would it be a feasible one for him? He seemed to decide in the affirmative, for in the small wee hours of the night he rose from his bed, and quieting his ready dog, dressed himself, and took another long survey from the window. Then he proceeded to open the bundle he had brought into town, taking from it a small object, which he hid in the breast of his coat. Then he thrust a box of matches into the pocket of his shirt, and ignoring his hat, which hung on a nail in one corner, he began his daring descent. Throwing one leg out of the window and clinging to the narrow jamb, he whirled himself about, and developing some of the instincts of the cat, soon reached the ledge in safety. Instantly his form, which had hitherto been so bent as to present almost the appearance of deformity, straightened itself until his whole person betrayed an agility and precision surprising to behold in any man past the first flush of youth.

To pass from the eaves to the shed and thence to the ground was the work of a moment.

The crooked branch of an old apple-tree which grew near the house, was of decided use to him and enabled him to make his risky descent with comparatively no noise. When he was on the ground, he stopped and listened, then wheeling rapidly about, proceeded to walk up the street.

The night was dark and threatened storm. Everywhere there was a sound of swishing boughs and rattling panes which served to deaden the noise of his tread on the pavement, but he seemed so anxious not to attract attention even in the darkness and solitude of this midnight hour that he stepped into the grass that bordered the road, and even took off his shoes that no echo might follow his movements.

The course he took led him in an entirely different direction from any he had traversed during the day. As soon as he reached the point where the court house stands, he turned east and went up Carberry hill. As there are but two or three houses on this slope, his destination became speedily apparent. On the brow of the hill where the wind blows strong-

est, stands the old Earle cottage, with its windows closed to every eye and its untrod doorstep hidden amid weeds that had choked up the entrance for many a year. In the daylight it had an utterly lonesome and deserted look, but at night, especially when the moon was hidden and the winds blew, it possessed a forbidding, almost an ominous look, which would have deterred anyone whose errand was less pressing than that of our midnight wanderer, from approaching, much less examining a spot so given over to solitude. A row of stunted oak trees shielded the house on one side, and marked off the limits of the deserted garden, where burdock and thistles grew instead of the homely vegetables and old-fashioned flowers of years ago. To-night all these trees were bending one way in the sharp gale, their whistling leaves and the *pat, pat* of the long limbs against the clap-boards of the house adding to the lugubriousness of the scene.

But to the man who stood in the long grass at the rear of this disused dwelling there was nothing in the hour or place to arouse dread or

awaken apprehension. He studied the house, but not with the eyes of a dreamer, and when he finally made up his mind to approach the rear door it was with determination in his face and a certain calculation in his movement which proved that he was there with a definite purpose.

One pull at the door evidently satisfied him of the uselessness of endeavoring to enter by force, for he left the spot at once, and began climbing a small shed near by. Reversing the plan he had followed at the tavern, he succeeded in climbing from ledge to ledge, until he reached a certain window which he ruthlessly smashed in. In less time than one would think, he had effected entrance into the house at the very place where there was least likelihood of the attempt being discovered, namely, under the shadow of one of those swishing trees whose branches brushed so close against the wall that a spray of leaves immediately thrust itself into the opening after him, covering up his passage with unnecessary haste, considering that there were no watchers within half a mile or more.

The place in which he found himself on dropping to the floor was so close and dark that he involuntarily opened out his arms to grope his way. But fearing broken floors and open staircases, he presently stopped and drew out the small object he had hidden in his breast, and which proved to be a pocket lantern. Lighting this, he looked around him and drew a deep breath of satisfaction. He was in a small attic room whose unfinished beams were so overlaid with cobwebs that he involuntarily ducked his head, though he was in but little danger of thrusting it against these noisome objects. A bed covered with a patched quilt was within reach of one hand, and on the other side was a chest of drawers with the articles necessary for making an humble toilet still on it, but so covered by the dust and cobwebs of years that he choked as he looked at it, and hesitated to set down his lantern on it.

Finally he compromised matters by placing it on an old chair; after which he took out a small blank book and began to jot down notes of what he saw. When finished with this room,

he passed into another and so on into the more roomy living chambers in front. Here he paused and took a deeper breath, though the air was still stifling and musty.

An opening, square in shape, occupied the middle of this upper floor, from which branched off the three sleeping rooms of this simple but not uncomfortable cottage. In the square were books, many of which this strange intruder took from the shelves and rapidly glanced over. Then he opened the small drawers at the bottom of the shelves, examining the trinkets and knick-knacks thus disclosed, with an eye rapidly brightening into an expression of mingled hope and determination. The pictures on the wall were few, but he apparently saw them all, nor did he pass the decayed fringes of the window curtains without touching them and noting their faded colors. When all that was to be seen in this small place was carefully remarked, the man crossed the threshold of the right-hand door and entered the large west chamber.

Something,—was it the atmosphere of the place, or some train of recollections awakened

by the objects about him?—seemed to subdue him at this point, and he paused for a moment with his head fallen on his breast. Then he raised it again, and with even more resolution than before began to survey the mildewed walls and faded furniture, with an eye that missed nothing, from the great four-poster to the mould-covered bellows at the side of the open fireplace. It had been Mrs. Earle's bedroom, and had witnessed the birth of Polly and the long and mysterious illness which had terminated in the death of the mother. Here Ephraim Earle had lavished kisses on his babe and laid his icy hand over the scarcely colder lids of his dead wife. Here had he experienced his keenest joys and here had he suffered his greatest sorrows. The room seemed alive with them yet, and from every corner stared mementos of the past which were all the more eloquent and impressive that no foreign hand had touched them since their owner had passed away from their midst a dozen years before. Even the candle which had lighted her last gasp remained where it had been left on a little table in one corner;

and beside it was a book from which the finger seemed to have been just withdrawn, though the dust that covered it lay thick on its browned cover, and the mark which issued from one end of its discolored leaves had lost its pristine hue and had faded to a tint almost beyond recognition. The stranger stopped before this book and seemed to be tempted to take it up, but refrained from doing so, as he had already refrained from meddling with many another object lying on the high cupboards and the tall mantel-shelf. But before the sticks in the fireplace he showed no such hesitation. He turned them and twirled them, and examined the ashes in which they had lain, and finally, seeing the end of a piece of paper, he drew it out. It was the fragment of a letter, worthless probably and of no especial interest in itself, but he seemed to regard it as a treasure, and after looking at it for a minute, he thrust it into his pocket.

There were a few articles of apparel hanging in the press at the foot of the bed, and these he looked carefully over. Some of them were men's clothes, and these he handled with

a lingering touch, smiling grimly as he did so. He even took down a coat, and after a moment's thought put it on, and surveyed himself thus accoutered in the film-covered mirror at the other end of the room. But the latter was too clouded to make a good reflection, and pleased to see that the sleeves came naturally to the wrist, though the buttons failed to fasten over the chest, he muttered stealthily as he drew the garment off, "One's arms do not lengthen with age, though the body often grows larger. A very good test indeed!"

There was a chest under the bed, and this he drew out, though with some evident misgivings and many a sly look at the worm-eaten carpet over which he had been obliged to drag it. The lock had been fastened, but he opened it with the crooked nail he drew from his pocket; and plunging into the trunk, pulled out one article after another, muttering in an indescribable tone as he handled each:

"My wife's wedding dress! The locket and chain I gave her! The cashmere shawl she always called her best! The lace folderols Aunt Milicent used to wear, and Grandpa

Hallam's gown in which he died when he was struck with apoplexy while preaching in Brother Burton's pulpit in Charlestown. A collection of keepsakes all remembered by me, even to this old spectacle case which must have been her grandmother's."

Putting the things all back in the exact order in which he found them, he relocked the trunk and thrust it carefully back into its old place. But before leaving the room he stood for several minutes in the doorway, and let, or seemed to let, the full aspect of the place sink into his consciousness, after which with a half-frightened look at the floor, as if he feared he had left the print of his feet behind him, he stepped again to the hall, and so into a small room adjoining.

Here he remained longer than in the one he had just left; for it had been Mr. Earle's workroom and it was full of reminiscences of his old labors. To enumerate the various objects which this strange intruder examined would occupy us too long and needlessly encumber this narrative. Enough that he gave the place the same minute inspection

he had accorded to every other spot he had previously entered, and by force of vivid imagination or a faithful remembrance seemed to live for a short half-hour in a past of hopeful work and mechanical triumphs. There was an inventor's model in one corner, and to this he gave his closest attention. Though he laid no finger upon it, fearful perhaps of leaving some trace of his presence behind him, he studied its parts with a glistening eye and half-sarcastic smile, saying, as he turned away at last:

"This is where the art of making explosives stood in '63. We have got further than that now."

There was a secretary in this room and before it he spent most of the remaining time. Some old letters which he found there engrossed him completely, and from one small drawer he took an object that interested him so much he failed to replace it on leaving the room. It was the faded miniature of a pale young mother and a blue-eyed babe. The mother had the look of the Lawrence family, and the child the promise of that saucy and

irresponsible loveliness he had seen the day before in the new-made heiress, Polly Earle. This was not all he carried away. After he had finished the letters, he sat a long time musing with knitted brows and rigid hands, then he examined the desk, and sounding it, listened with accustomed ear to the echo made by his knuckles on the various partitions.

Suddenly he stopped, and leaning over a certain receptacle, from which he had drawn a small drawer, he tapped again, and seeming to be satisfied with the result, began to manipulate the place with his penknife till the false bottom came out and he found in the shallow space thus disclosed a small box which he eagerly pulled out, opened, and examined. What it held I do not know, but whatever it was, he thrust it with a triumphant look into his breast, and then repairing the mischief he had done, first closed the drawers and then the desk, shaking visibly as he did so, perhaps with something of the feeling of a thief, though his face had none of the aspects of one, and his step when he moved away had a resolution in it that added height to his stature, which

since he had allowed himself to walk upright was imposing.

In another moment he had carried the lantern from the room, and the sleep of years had descended again upon its dark and silent precincts.

VI.

THE PORTRAIT.

HAD the sides of this house suddenly fallen in and revealed to the distant neighbors at the foot of the hill the vision of this creeping marauder passing through the haunted rooms and down the creaking staircases of this long-unopened house, what a panic of fear would have swept through them at the uncanny sight! Glints of light from the small lantern which he carried, passed flickering from wall to wall, and on one window-shade threw an exaggerated outline of his form with its long beard and groping hand, which if seen from without would have sent most persons hurrying down the road. But there was no one in the fields that night, and this passing glimpse of the intruder went out in darkness without any other alarm being

given than that which came from the creaking pines and pollards without.

He was on the first floor now, and being more fearful of surprise than in the rooms above he trod more carefully and was more attentive as to where the light of his lantern fell. The parlor, which in houses of this stamp is sufficiently musty when the place is inhabited and a dozen children pass its charmed door every day, was worse than a tomb on this night of its resurrection, and almost drove the man, who so fearlessly opened it, into the open air for refreshment. Being near the ground, its walls had become a prey to damp and mildew, and had not the two family portraits adorning the space over the mantel-shelf been so fortunate as to hang on an inner wall, their ruin would not have been confined to the gilded frames.

It was before these pictures the visitor took his stand. One was the portrait of an old man, and at this he barely glanced. But on the other he gazed earnestly and long, calling up the living appearance of the man it represented and comparing it with his own.

"Taken a year after marriage," he presently commented, with his old sarcastic smile. "That was, let me see, seventeen years ago. No wonder the cheeks are fresh-colored and the locks unmixed with gray. When I am shaved and my beard trimmed the difference of years will not be so perceptible. Yet time makes changes under the most favorable circumstances, and when a man has led a life like mine, his features naturally coarsen. I must remember this fact when people tell me I have lost the frank, attractive look I see here. Fast living and wild expenditure leave their marks, and I will be as good an example of the returned prodigal as any Bible-pounding exhorter could wish. Yet," and he sighed, "it is not altogether pleasant to remember one's misdeeds, or to note the difference in such a face as this and that which lies under my long, disfiguring beard."

These words, which he had uttered aloud, had no sooner left his lips than he was startled by the silence that followed. A sense of his position suddenly came over him, and casting one final glance at the portrait, he

turned quickly away, murmuring under his breath:

"That ring on the finger,—it was pawned long ago. What a past I will have to disclose if my friends inquire into the matter too closely."

Fifteen minutes more he spent in cellar and attic, and then he swung himself out of the window on to the tree, and thence lightly to the ground. As he did so he thought he heard a sigh, but just at that moment the trees gave a great swish and bent almost double, and he forgot the lesser sound and never thought to look behind him when he started to move down the road.

Had he done so, he would have seen by the first faint streaks of morning light, a figure standing at the angle of the house, with hat pulled low, and hands thrust out in superstitious protest at what was evidently considered a spectre stalking from the haunted house.

The next day the bent and feeble wayfarer announced that there was no work to be found in Hamilton, and took his leave of the place, followed by the faithful dog. But at the out-

skirts of the town, the latter paused, and whining, raised his protest at this departure; and when he found that his new master was determined to go, he lay down in the dusty road and refused to accompany him any further.

He would not leave the town in which his old master lay buried.

PART III.

A RETURN.

VII.

WHAT THE STROKE OF A BELL CAN DO.

IT was in the latter part of June, and the day was so perfect that it seemed like wanton waste to use the hours for study or work. The roses, which were always plentiful in the Fisher garden, had probably passed their prime, but their perfume was still in the air, and there were enough lingering buds on the thorny stalks to tempt Polly into their midst. She had gathered quite a bouquet, and was turning toward the house when she heard her name called. Blushing delightfully, she stopped.

Young Unwin was leaning over the wall that separated the two gardens.

"Polly, Polly!" he called. "Come here, dear, I have something of real importance to say to you."

His tone was graver than usual, and her gay spirits were dashed, yet the dimples remained in her cheeks and the saucy gleam in her eye, as drawing near, she paused, with a mock curtsey, just out of his arm's reach on her side of the wall.

"Well, what is it, Mr. Persistency?" said she, a delicious smile robbing her words of any sting they might otherwise have contained. "This is the third time to-day you have summoned me to this wall."

"Once to give you a rare flower, which had just opened in the conservatory. Once to see if you appreciated this lovely day, and once,—O Polly, my father is anything but well to-day."

Her face, which had been brimming with mirth sobered instantly.

"Is he going to die?" she inquired, with alarm.

"I fear so, dear, and so it becomes our

duty to tell him our wishes and expectations. Are you willing to go with me to his bedside? We should love each other more dearly for his blessing."

"Do you think"—the words came with difficulty,—"that he will give us his blessing?"

"I think so; he has always seemed to like you, has he not?"

"Yes, but——"

"I know what you mean, Polly; and it would be sheer hypocrisy for me not to acknowledge what every one knows, that my father is a very proud man and that he is likely to have ambitious hopes for his son. But are they not likely to be realized by our marriage? When you have taken up your abode in the old Izard mansion, you will be quite an eligible match even for Squire Unwin's son." A tender, yet half-sarcastic smile took the edge off these words, and showed the little maiden how dearly she was loved. Whereupon she shook her pretty head.

"But I am so lacking in accomplishments, Clarke, and he so admires an accomplished woman. Why, I barely know one language

well, and your stepmother, I hear, speaks three."

"All of which she will teach you, dear. Accomplishments are easily acquired. In five years you will be a model of learning and culture."

She laughed. "I look like it, do I not? See. I have not even bought myself a new dress. I have had other things to think of."

"I like you in that rose pink gingham, but my father has a great fondness for white. Have n't you a white dress, Polly?"

"You know I have," she pouted. "Did n't you tell me last Sunday that——"

"Ah, I remember. Yes, yes, put that dress on and come round by the front gate; I will be there to meet you."

"But Mrs. Unwin? You have not told me whether she is likely to approve. I should not want her to greet me coldly."

"My mother? My darling mother? I never think of her as a stepmother, Polly dear. Oh, she knows all about it and is ready to welcome you as a daughter."

The young girl, with a sudden lift of her

head, smiled joyously and seemed to gather courage at once.

"I will go," she frankly declared. "And yet I dread to meet him. Is he so very sick, and will his looks frighten me?"

"It may be," answered Clarke, "but I shall be there to make it as easy for you as possible. Do not think of my father, but of me and my love."

She sighed with joy and ran off, as free a thing as the sun shone upon; and he watching her felt his heart soften more and more to her womanly sweetness.

"My father will feel her charm," he murmured, and hastened up the garden walk to the gate where he had promised to wait for her.

Clarke Unwin was no ordinary man. He was the thoughtful son of a proud reserved father, and he had an aim in life quite apart from the accumulation of wealth, which had so distinguished the elder man. He was ambitious of becoming a famous electrician and had already shown sufficient talent in this direction for his friends to anticipate great re-

sults from his efforts. He had a scheme now on hand which only needed the small capital which his father had promised him to become, as he believed, a practical reality. Indeed, negotiations had already been entered into for his entrance into a firm of enterprising men in Cleveland, where his energy would have full scope. All that he needed was the money which they required as a guaranty against failure, and this money, some five thousand dollars or so, had, as I have said, been promised to him, though not yet advanced, by his indulgent parent.

To sound that father's mind on this and on the still dearer subject of his marriage, young Unwin had prevailed upon Polly to enter this house of sickness. At the door they were met by a sweet-faced lady, who took Polly in her arms before seating her in a little ante-room.

"I must ask you to remain here for just a few minutes," said she. "It would be a shock to Mr. Unwin to see you without any preparation. Clarke will have a talk with his father first, and then come back for you. Let me hope it will be with a welcome that will make

amends to you for your long years of orphanage among us."

"You are very good," came from the trembling lips of the young girl. Mrs. Unwin's grace and unconscious dignity always abashed her.

"Clarke informs me that you are not lacking in that same desirable quality," whispered the other lady, and with a smile which gave an air of pathos to her faded yet beautiful face, she turned away and followed her son out into the hall. As they passed along she impetuously stopped and faced him. Grace Unwin had been a mother to Clarke for thirteen years, and she loved him devotedly.

"Clarke," said she, "I dread this ordeal most unaccountably. Your father has had something on his mind of late. Do you know of any trouble weighing upon him besides this dreadful one of leaving us?"

"No," rejoined the wondering youth. "He has never confided in me, mother, as much as he has in you. If you know nothing—"

"And I do not," she murmured.

"You must have been deceived by your af-

fection. He is not the man to brood over petty troubles, or to be cast down by matters he could regulate with a word."

"I know it, yet he has not appeared natural to me for some time. Long before the physician told him that his disease was mortal, his actions betrayed a melancholy which has always been foreign to his nature, and for the very reason that he has succeeded in hiding it from you, I feel that it has its seat in something vital."

"And have you never asked him what it was, dear mother? You who are such a tender nurse and so adored a wife must have moments when even his reserve would yield to such gentle importunities as yours."

"It would seem so, but I have never dared to broach the subject. When your father chooses to be silent, it is difficult for any one to question him."

"Yes, mother; and yet I must dare his displeasure to-day. I must know his mind about Polly."

"Yes, that is right, and Heaven's blessing go with you. I shall be outside here in the hall.

If you strike the bell once I will fetch in Polly; if you strike it twice, I will come in alone; if you do not strike it at all, I will remain where I am, praying God to give you patience to meet the disappointment of your life."

The man whose reticent nature had aroused this conversation was just waking from a fretful sleep when his son entered. He was a tall, spare man with an aristocratic air and a fine head, who was wont to walk the streets as if the whole town belonged to him, and who had been spoken of as "the Squire" from his earliest manhood. Now his proud head lay low, and his once self-satisfied countenance wore a look that caused a pang to strike the heart of his son, before the unrest visible in his whole figure could find vent in words.

"What is it, father? You look distressed; cannot something be done to relieve you?"

The man who had never been known to drop his eyes before any-one slowly turned his face to the wall.

"There is no help," he murmured; "my hour has come." And he was silent. Clarke moved uneasily; he hardly knew what to do.

It seemed cruel to disturb his father at this moment, and yet his conscience told him he would be wrong to delay a communication that would set him right in his own eyes. The father settled the matter by saying abruptly: "Sit down, I have something to say to you."

Clarke complied, drawing a chair close up to the bedside. He knew that one of his father's peculiarities was a dislike to raising his voice. For a moment he waited, but the father seemed loath to speak. Clarke therefore remarked, after a certain time had passed:

"Nothing you can say to me will fail of having my respectful attention. If I can do anything to relieve your cares—" The look which his father here turned upon him startled him from continuing. Never had he seen such an expression in those eyes before.

"Can you go so far as to forgive?" the old man asked.

"Forgive?" echoed Clarke, hardly believing his ears. "What is there I have to forgive in you? The benefits you have bestowed

upon me, the education I have received and your fatherly care?"

"Hush!" the half-lifted hand seemed to entreat and a shadow of the old commanding aspect revisited the ashy countenance before him. "You do not know all that has happened this last year. I have ruined you, Clarke, ruined your mother; and now I must die without having the opportunity of retrieving myself."

Surprised out of his usual bearing of profound respect, Clarke sprang to his feet.

"Do you mean," he asked, "that your money is gone; that you are dying a bankrupt?"

The old man—for Frederick Unwin was twenty years older than his wife—grew so pale that his son became seriously alarmed.

"You are sick—fainting," he cried; let me call someone." But a glance from his father's commanding eye held him where he stood.

"No, no; it is from shame, Clarke, possibly from grief. You have been on the whole a good boy, and I have taken pride in you. To

leave you with your hopes dashed, and the care of a mother on your hands, is a humiliation I never expected. I—I have lost all, Clarke, and am, besides, in debt. I have not five hundred dollars to give you, let alone five thousand. You will have to take up with some lesser position, some clerkship with a salary, reserving to yourself the right to curse a father who was so shortsighted as to invest his whole fortune in a mine that petered out before the machinery was paid for."

Clarke, to whom the prospect thus opened meant the demolition of more than one dream, sat dazed for a moment in a state of despair, not noticing that his arm had struck the bell on the small table beside which he was sitting, making it ring out in one clear, low note.

"There is even a mortgage on this house," the wretched father went on. "I thought the amount so raised might bridge me over my present difficulties, but it is gone like the rest, and now it only remains for me to be gone, too, for you to understand into what a position I have put you by my folly and ignorance."

"Father I would not let any one else

speak of you so in my hearing. You meant to better your position, and if you made mistakes, we—that is, my mother and myself, must try and retrieve them."

"But your chances with Stevens and Wright? Your excellent plan for—" The son suppressed the sigh that rose to his lips and resolutely lifted his head.

"That dream is over," he said. I shall think no more of my own advancement, but only of supporting my mother by any humble means that offers."

"You have not confidence enough in your schemes to borrow the money you want?"

"I will never borrow."

The old man, weakened by illness and shaken by the break he had just made in an almost life-long reserve, uttered a deep sigh. Clarke, whose thoughts were with Polly as much as they were with his surrendered hopes, re-echoed this sound of despair before saying:

"I have always cherished a certain sort of pride, too. I could not feel free under a burden of debt incurred for something whose

value is yet to be tested. I cannot be beholden to any one for a start which is as likely to lead to failure as to success."

"Not if that person is your promised wife?" burst from trembling and eager lips behind him, and Polly, accompanied by Mrs. Unwin, who had mistaken the ring of the bell for the signal which had been established between herself and Clarke, stepped into the room, and advanced with timid steps but glowing cheeks into the presence of the equally astonished son and father.

"Polly!" sprang involuntarily from the lover's lips, as he rose and cast a doubtful glance toward his father. But the latter, roused by the fresh young face turned so eagerly toward him, had lost his white look, and was staring forward with surprised but by no means repelling glances.

"What does she say?" he murmured. "This should be Polly Earle, to whom some kindly friend has just left twenty thousand dollars. Does she love you, Clarke, and was the word she just used 'wife'? I 'm getting so dull of hearing with this ceaseless pain, that

I do not always understand what is said in my presence."

Clarke, delighted with the eagerness apparent in his suffering father's look and manner, took the young girl by the hand and brought her forward. "This is the woman whom I chose for my wife when I thought my prospects warranted me in doing so. But now that I have little else than debts to offer her, I have scruples in accepting her affection, dear as it is and disinterested as she shows herself. I would not seem to take advantage of her youth."

"But it is I," she broke in gayly, 'who am likely to take advantage of your disappointments! I heard by mistake, I think, something of what your father has had to say to you, and my only feeling, you see, is one of delight that I can do something to show my gratitude for all that you and others have done for me in the years when I was a penniless orphan. Is that a wrong feeling, Mr. Unwin, and will you deny me the privilege of—" She could say no more, but her eyes, her lips, her face were one appeal, and that of

the most glowing kind. Clarke's eyes dropped lest they should betray his feelings too vividly, and Mrs. Unwin, who had thrown her arm around Polly, turned her face toward her husband with such an expression of thankfulness that he did not know which caused him the greater surprise, his wife's sudden beauty or the frank yet timorous aspect of this hitherto scarcely noted young girl in the presence of the two great masters of the world, Love and Death.

"Come here!" he finally entreated, holding out one shaking hand toward Polly. She tossed her hat aside like a wild creature who recoils from any sort of restraint, and coming up close to the bed, fell on her knees by his side.

"So you love Clarke?" he queried.

Her eyes and cheeks spoke for her.

"Love him well enough to marry him even now, with all his debts and disabilities?"

Still her looks spoke; and he went calmly on: "Then, my little girl, you shall marry him, and when you see him prosperous and on the high road to success in his chosen field

of labor,—think that his father blesses you and that by your loyalty and devotion you took away the sting from an old man's death."

A sob and a smile answered him, and Clarke, to whom this scene was the crowing glory of his love, turned and took his mother in his arms, before stooping to raise his young betrothed. It was the happiest hour in this family's history, but it was the precursor of sorrow. That night Mr. Unwin died.

VIII.

THE HOUSE ON THE HILL.

THERE were two topics of interest agitating the town. One was the appearance of a new hermit in the old cave on the mountain side, and the other, the sale of the Unwin mansion and the prospective removal of Frederick Unwin's widow and son into the haunted house of the Earles. The latter occasioned the greater amount of talk. That this move on their part was but the preliminary step to a marriage between Clarke and the young heiress had been known for some time. But to see a house so long deserted reopened, its doors and windows thrown wide to the sun, and the smoke rising once more from its desolate chimneys, was an event calculated to interest all who had felt the indescribable awe surrounding a place abandoned by human life

while yet possessing all the appointments of a home.

Polly, who for some reason had given up her former plan of renting the big Izard place, was full of business and glowing with the excitement of what was considered by many in the town a rather daring venture. Even Dr. Izard, who was not wont to show emotion, looked startled when he heard of her intentions, and seemed disposed to forbid the young girl letting a house so given over to damp and mildew. But when she urged the necessity of providing Mrs. Unwin with an immediate home and hinted at the reluctance which that lady had shown to living at the other end of the village, he relented and merely insisted that the place should be thoroughly aired and renovated before Mrs. Unwin went into it. As he was not that lady's physician, had never been even a visitor at the Unwin mansion, he could say no more. But Polly needed no further hint, and went back to her own humble home with the most generous projects in her head for Mrs. Unwin's future comfort and happiness.

It was a great day in Hamilton when she and Clarke and five or six interested neighbors first threw open the creaking front door of the Earle cottage and let the sunlight stream into its hushed interior. To her, who had never been permitted to enter the place since she had been taken from it fourteen years before, it was an event merely to press her foot on the worm-eaten carpets and slide her fingers along the walls that had once felt the touch of her parents' garments. Each room was a revelation, each corner a surprise. She glided from hall to chamber and from chamber to hall like the spirit of a younger age introduced into the memorials of a long-departed one. Her fresh cheek, from which even awe could not quite banish the dimples, looked out of place and yet strangely beautiful amid the dim surroundings of the stiffly-ordered rooms and old-fashioned furnishings.

With an instinct natural enough under the circumstances, she had wished to be the first to enter the house and cross the threshold of each apartment. But Clarke was not far behind her. In front of the portrait of her

father she paused and drew her friends around her.

"Oh!" she cried; "it was wrong to keep this from me; I should have been brought up under the influence of that face." But as she further contemplated it, her first enthusiasm faded and an indescribable look of vague distrust stole into her rosy countenance, and robbed it of half its joyousness. "I—I wish there was a picture of my mother here," she whispered to Clarke, whose arm she had nervously seized. "She had a beautiful face, they say, all gentleness and goodness."

"Perhaps we shall find one upstairs," he suggested, turning to open more windows.

"Oh, it is cold," she murmured, and moved with quite an unaccustomed air of gravity toward the staircase. Her mother's room, with its many suggestions of days which were not entirely forgotten by her, seemed to restore her mental balance, shaken by that short contemplation of her father's portrait. She wept as her eyes fell upon the bed where she had last seen the outstretched form of her dying mother; but her tears were tender and quite

unlike, both in their source and effect, the shuddering recoil which had seized her after she had gazed a few minutes at her father's pictured face.

The book which a certain hand had hesitated to touch not so very long ago, she took up, and opening with some difficulty the pages which time and dampness had glued together, she showed Clarke these words, written on one of the blank leaves in front :

"Ah ! what is life !
'T is but a passing touch upon the world ;
A print upon the beaches of the earth
Next flowing wave will wash away ; a mark
That something passed ; a shadow on a wall,
While looking for the substance, shade departs :
A drop from the vast spirit-cloud of God,
That rounds upon a stock, a stone, a leaf,
A moment, then exhales again to God."

"My mother's writing, I know ! What a difference in our dispositions ! Where do you suppose I got my cheerful temperament from ? Not from my father ?" And again she faintly shuddered.

"Your father's desk is in the other room,"

commented somebody. Looking up she laid the book softly down and prepared to leave the one spot in the house of which she had any remembrance. "I shall hate to see this dust removed, or these articles touched. Do you think I could be allowed to do the first handling? It is so like a sacrilege to give it over to some stranger."

But Clarke shook his head. "I have let you come with us into this damp house because it seemed only proper that your eyes should be the first to meet its desolation. I shall not let you remain here one moment after we are gone. If I were willing, Dr. Izard would not be; so do not think of it again."

The name of the doctor seemed to awaken in her a strange chain of thought.

"Ah, Dr. Izard! He was standing beside my father when he closed my mother's eyes. Why did he not come with me this morning to see me open the house? I begged him to do so but he declined quite peremptorily."

"Dr. Izard does not like me," remarked Clarke sententiously.

"Does not like you? Why?" queried

Polly innocently, pausing on the threshold they were crossing.

"I do not know: he has always avoided me, more than he has other people, I mean—and once when I spoke to him, the strangest expression crossed his face."

"I do not understand. He has always been very kind to me. Are you sure that you like him?"

"I am indifferent to him; that is, I admire him, as everyone must who has eyes and an understanding. But I have no feeling toward him; he does not seem to have any place in my life."

"He has in mine," she reluctantly admitted. "I often go to him for advice."

"Was it by his advice," whispered Clarke, bending till his mouth touched her ear, "that you gave me your heart?"

The little hand that lay on his arm drew itself slowly out and fell quite softly and significantly on her heaving breast.

"No," said she. "I have another adviser here, fully as powerful as he can ever be."

The gesture, the accent were so charming

that he was provoked at the peering curiosity of the persons accompanying them. He would have liked to kiss those rosy lips for the sweetest thing they had ever said.

Had the midnight visitor of a few weeks back known what a careless crowd would soon invade these hidden premises he might not have been so wary in his movements. When Polly reached her father's desk, she found one or two neighbors there before her.

"Oh, look at this curious old inkstand!" exclaimed one.

"And at this pile of note-books standing just where Ephraim Earle must have laid them down!"

"And at this pen with the ink dried on it!"

"And at this ridiculous little China shepherdess pursing up her lips as if she knew the whole mystery but would not tell!"

Polly, whose ears had been more or less closed by the episode with Clarke just above mentioned, seemed scarcely to hear their words. She stood by her father's work-table with her hand on her father's chair, in a dream of love that moistened her down-cast eyes and awak-

ened strange, tremulous movements in the corners of her sensitive lips. But soon the tokens of past ambition and of interrupted labor everywhere apparent, began to influence her spirits, and her looks showed a depression which was nothing less than startling to Clarke. Even the neighbors observed it and moved chattering away, so that in a few minutes Polly and Clarke were left standing alone in this former scene of her father's toil and triumphs.

"What is the matter, my darling?" he now asked, seeing her turn away from the very objects he supposed would interest her most.

"I do not know," she answered. "I do not like this room; I do not like the effect it has upon me." Had the gliding visitant whose shadow had last fallen on these walls left some baleful influence behind him, or was the cause of her distrust of deeper origin and such as she hardly dared admit to herself?

"The air is close here," remarked Clarke; "and the presence of all this dust is enough to stifle anyone. Let us go down into the garden and get a breath of fresh air."

She pointed to the open windows. "How can it be close with all this light pouring in? No, no, it is not that; I am simply frightened. Did you ever stop to think?" she suddenly inquired, "what I should do or how I should feel if—*if my father came back?*"

"No," he replied startled. "No one supposes him to be alive. Why should you have such morbid thoughts?"

"I do not know." She laughed and endeavored to throw off the shadow that had fallen upon her. "You must think me very superstitious, but I would not walk down that rear passage for anything; not even with you, I should expect to encounter a tall, military-looking figure, with a face pleasing enough at first sight, but which would not bear close scrutiny. A face like the painted one below," she added, with an involuntary shudder.

"But that is not a bad face; it is only a keen and daring one. I like it very much. I remember my mother has always said you inherited your beauty from your father."

But this seemed to irritate her indescribably. "No, no," she cried, shaking her head and al-

most stamping her little foot. "I don't believe it and I won't have it!" Then, as if startled by her own vehemence, she blushed and dragged him away toward the door. "He may have been handsome, but I have not eyes like his, I am sure. If I could only see how my mother looked."

In the hall below they paused. There was much to be said concerning the contemplated alterations to be made in the house, but she did not seem to take any interest in the matter. Evidently the effect of her visit upstairs had not entirely left her, for just as they were turning toward the door she gave an involuntary look behind her, and laughing, to show her sense of the foolishness of her own words, she cried :

"So we did not meet my father's ghost after all. Well now, I may be sure that his interest is in other scenes and that he will never come back here." As she spoke a shadow crossed the open doorway.

"Do not be too sure of anything!" interposed a voice, and a strange but by no means attractive looking man stepped calmly into the house and paused with a low bow before her.

IX.

ASK DR. IZARD.

POLLY uttered a sharp cry and stared at the intruder blankly. He was tall and military looking and had a smooth, well-shaven face. But his clothes were in rags and his features, worn by illness and coarsened by dissipation were of a type to cause a young girl like her to recoil.

"Who is this man?" she cried at last, "and what is he doing here?"

"It is the new hermit! The man who has taken up with Hadley's old quarters," exclaimed one of the neighbors from the group about Polly. "I saw him yesterday in the graveyard."

"Yes, and there is his dog, Piper. He follows every old tramp who comes into town. Don't you remember how he tagged at the

heels of that old beggar with a long beard, who went through here a month ago?"

"This fellow looks as if he were strong enough to work," whispered one of the women.

"I shan't give any of my stale victuals to a man with an arm strong enough to fell an ox," murmured another.

Here Clarke, who had only waited for an opportunity to speak, now advanced to the man standing in the doorway. As he did so he noticed that the wayfarer's attention was not fixed upon the persons before him, but upon the walls and passages of the house they were in.

"Have you come here begging?" he inquired. "If so you have made a mistake; this is a disused house which we have been opening for the first time in years."

"I know its every room and its every corner," answered the haggard-looking tramp imperturbably. "I could tell you what lies under the stairs in the cellar, and point out to you the books which have been stacked away in the garret: That is, if no other hand has disturbed them since I placed them there fifteen years ago."

A cry of astonishment, of despair almost, answered these words. It came from the blanching lips of Polly. Clarke trembled as he heard it, but otherwise gave no sign of concern. On the contrary he eyed the intruder authoritatively.

"Tell me your name!" he demanded. "Are you——"

"I will not say who I am, here, with the sunlight streaming on my back and no friendly eye to recognize my features. I will only speak from under the portrait of Ephraim Earle; I want a witness to the truth of my statements and in that canvas I look for it."

And neither heeding Clarke's detaining hand, nor the almost frantic appeal which spoke in the eyes of the young girl whose question he had at last answered, he stalked into the parlor and paused directly beneath the portrait he had named.

"Cannot you see who I am?" he asked, rearing his tall head beside the keen-faced visage that looked down from the wall.

"The same man grown older," exclaimed one.

"Ephraim Earle himself!" echoed another.

"Come back from the dead!"

"The moment the house was opened!"

"Are you Ephraim Earle?" demanded Clarke, trembling for Polly in whose breast a real and unmistakable terror was rapidly taking the place of an imaginary one.

"Since I must say so, yes!" was the firm reply. "Where is my daughter? She should be on hand here to greet me."

"I have no words of welcome. I never thought of my father being like this. Take me away, Clarke, take me away!" So spoke the terrified little one, clinging to one of her best-known neighbors for support.

"I will take you away," Clarke assured her. "There is no need of your greeting this man till he has proved his claim to you. A girl's heart cannot be expected to embrace such a fact in a moment."

"Oh, it's Ephraim Earle fast enough," insisted one old woman. "I remember him well. Don't you remember me, old neighbor?"

"Don't I?" was the half hearty, half jeering

answer. "And I wish I had a pair of your green and white worsted socks now."

"It 's he, it 's he!" vociferated the delighted woman. "When he was a young man I sold him many a pair of my knitting. To be sure I use blue now instead of green, but they were all green in his day, bless him!" As this prayer was not repeated by her companions in the room, upon whom his reckless if not sinister appearance had made anything but a happy impression, he came slowly from under the picture and stood for a moment before the dazed and shrinking Polly.

"You are not glad to see me," he remarked, "and I must say I do not wonder. I have lived a hard life since I left you a crying child in your mother's room upstairs, but I am your father, for all that, and you owe me respect if not obedience. Look up, Maida, and let me see what kind of a woman you have grown to be."

At this name, which had been a pet one with her parents and with them alone, the neighbors stared and Polly shrank, feeling the iron of certainty pierce deep into her soul. She met

his eyes, however, with courage and answered his demand by a very natural reproach.

"If you are my father, and alas! I see no reason to doubt it, I should think you would feel some shame in alluding to a growth which you have done nothing to advance."

"I know," he admitted, "that you have something with which to reproach me; the secret of those days is not for ears like yours. I left you, but—never ask me why, Maida. And now, go out into the sun. I should not like to have my first act toward you a cruel one."

Dazed, almost fainting, doubting whether or no she was the victim of some horrible nightmare, she let herself be led away to where the sun shone down on the lilacs of the overgrown garden. But no sooner did she realize that the man of her dread had been left in the house with her neighbors than she urged Clarke to return at once to where he was.

"Let him be watched," she cried; "follow him as he goes about the house. It is his; I feel that it is his, but do not let us succumb to his demands without a struggle. He has such

a wicked face, and his tones are so harsh and unfatherly."

Clarke, who had come to a similar conclusion, though by other means than herself, hastened to obey her. He found the self-styled Earle in the midst of the group of neighbors, chattering freely and answering questions with more or less free and easy banter. Though privation spoke in every outline of his face and form, and poverty in every rag of his dress, his bearing gave evidences of refinement, and no one, not even Clarke himself, doubted that if he were put to the test he would show himself to be at least the wreck of the once brilliant scholar and man of resources. He was drawing the whole crowd after him through the house and was hazarding guesses right and left to prove the excellence of his memory.

"Let us see," he cried, as they one and all paused at the top of the staircase, before entering the rooms on the upper floor. "I used to keep my books here—such ones as I had not discarded and stacked away in the topmost story. And I used to pride myself

on knowing where every volume was kept. Consult the shelves for me now and see if on the third one from the bottom and nearer to the left than to the right there is not a volume of Bacon's Essays. There is? Good! I knew it would be there if some one had not moved it. And the ten volumes of Shakespeare—are they not on the lower shelf somewhere near the middle? I thought so. A capital old edition it is, too; printed by T. Bensley for Wynne & Scholey, Paternoster Row. And Gibbon's *Rise and Fall*, with a volume of Euripides for a companion? Yes? And on the topmost shelf of all, far out of the reach of any hand but mine, a choice edition of Hawthorne—my favorite author. Do you see them all? I am glad of that; I loved my books, and often when very far away from them used to recall the hour when I had them under my eye and within reach of my hand."

"I wonder if he used to recall the child he left, tossed helpless upon the mercies of the town?" murmured one of the neighbors.

"Is my desk here, and has it been touched?" he now asked, proceeding hastily into the work-

room. "Ah, it all looks very natural," he remarked; "very natural! I can scarcely believe that I have been gone more than a day. Oh, there's the model of the torpedo I was planning! Let me see," and he lifted up the half-completed model, with what Clarke could not but call a very natural emotion, looking it over part by part and finally putting it down with a sigh. "Good for those days," he commented, "but would not answer now. Too complicated by far; explosive agencies should be more simple in their construction." And so on for half an hour; then he descended and walked away of his own accord to the front door.

"I have seen the old place!" he blandly observed, "and that is all I expected. If my daughter sees fit to acknowledge me, she will seek me in the wild spot in which I have made for myself a home. Here I shall not come again. I have not returned to the place of my birth to be a bugbear to my only child."

"But," cried some one in protest, "you are poor and you are hungry."

"I am what fate and my own folly have made me," he declared. "I ask for no sympathy, nor do I feel disposed to urge my natural rights."

"If you are Polly Earle's father, you will be fed and you will be clothed," put in Clarke hotly. "There is a meal for you now at the tavern, if you will go there and take it."

But the proud man, pointing to his dog drew himself up and turned scornfully away. "He can procure me as much as that," said he. "When my daughter has affection and a child's consideration to show me, then let her come to Hadley's cave. Food! Clothing! I have had an apology for both for fourteen years, but love—never; and all I want just now is love!"

Polly, who was not many steps off, heard these words and, moved by fear or disgust, dropped her hands which she had instinctively raised at his approach. He saw and smiled grimly, then with a bow that belied his aspect and recalled the old days when a bow passed for something more than a perfunctory greeting, he moved sternly down the walk and out

through the stiff old gate into the dusty high-road.

Half a dozen or more of the most eager witnesses of this extraordinary scene followed him down the hill and into town, anxious no doubt to set the town ablaze with news of Ephraim Earle's return and of his identity with the newly arrived hermit at Hadley's cave.

X.

AN INCREDIBLE OCCURRENCE.

DR. IZARD had of late presented a more cheerful appearance. His step was lighter and his face less generally downcast. He even was seen to smile one morning at the antics of some children, an unprecedented thing in his history, one would think, from the astonishment it caused among the gossips.

He had been called away several times during the month and the card with the word "absent" on it was very often to be seen hanging beside his door. People grew tired of this, though they knew it meant fame and money to the doctor, and the newly-fledged physician from Boston, whose office was at the other end of the town, prospered in consequence. But Dr. Izard only seemed relieved at this and came and went, as I have said,

with a less gloomy if not positively brightened countenance.

He had always kept for himself one solitary place of resort in the village. Without this refuge life would often have been insupportable to him. It was—strange to say, for the Izards had always been aristocratic—the humble house of the village shoemaker, a simple but highly respected man who with his aged wife had been, from sheer worth of character, a decided factor in town for the last twenty-five years.

The little house in which he lived and plied his useful trade stood on the hill-side a few yards above the Fisher cottage, and it was in his frequent visits to this spot that Dr. Izard had seen so much of Polly. The window in which he usually sat overlooked the Fisher garden, and as his visits had extended over years he had ample opportunity for observing her growing beauty from the time she was a curly-headed imp of four to the day she faced the world a gay-hearted damsel of eighteen.

It had been a matter of some mystery in the past why Dr. Izard, with his trained mind and

refined tastes, affected this humble home and sought with such assiduity the companionship of this worthy but by no means cultured couple. But this, together with other old wonders, had long lost its hold upon public attention, no one thinking of inquiring any longer into the cause of a habit that had become so fixed it was regarded as part of the village's history. One effect, however, remained. No one thought of entering the shoemaker's shop while Dr. Izard sat there. It would have been thought an intrusion by both guest and host.

Mr. and Mrs. Fanning, who had themselves long ceased to wonder at his preference for their society, invariably stopped their work when he entered and greeted him with the same words of welcome they had used fourteen years before when he had unexpectedly taken a seat in the shop without having been summoned for professional purposes. After which necessary ceremony they turned again to their several labors and the doctor sat down in his especial seat, which, as I have said, was in one of the windows, and lapsed into the silence he invariably maintained for half his stay. The

time chosen for his visit was usually at nightfall, and whether it was that the charms of nature were unusually attractive to him at that hour, or whether something or somebody in the adjoining gardens secretly interested him, he invariably turned his eyes outward, with an expression that touched the heart of the old lady who watched him and caused many a glance of secret intelligence to pass between her and her equally concerned husband.

Not till it was quite dark and the lights had been lit in the shop, would the doctor turn about—often with a sigh too unconscious to be repressed—and face again the humble couple. But when he did so, it was to charm them with the most cordial and delightful conversation. There was even sparkle in it, but it was only for this aged pair of workers, whose wit was sufficient for appreciation, and whose hearts responded to every effort made to interest them by their much revered visitor. After a quarter of an hour of this hearty interchange of neighborly comment, he would leave the house, to come again a few evenings later.

But one evening there was a break in the

usual order of things. The doctor was sitting, as he had sat a hundred times before, in his chair by the window, and Mr. Fanning was hammering away at his bench and Mrs. Fanning reading the *Watchman*, when there came a sound of voices from the front and the door burst open to the loud cry of—

"O Mrs. Fanning, Mrs. Fanning! Such news! Ephraim Earle has come back! Ephraim Earle, whom we all thought dead ten years ago!"

Mrs. Fanning, who with all her virtues dearly loved a bit of gossip, and who knew, or thought she did, everything that was going on in town, ran without once looking round her to the door, and Mr. Fanning, who could not but feel startled also by an event so unexpected and so long looked upon as impossible, started to follow her, when something made him look back at the doctor. The sight that met his eyes stunned him, and caused him to pause trembling where he was. In all the years he had known Dr. Izard he had never seen him look as he did at that moment. Was it surprise that affected him, or was it fear, or some other in-

comprehensible emotion? The good old man could not tell; but he wished the doctor would speak. At last the doctor did, and the hollow tones he used made the aged shoemaker recoil.

"What is that? What are they talking about? They mentioned a name? Whose name? Not Polly's father's?"

"Yes," faltered his startled companion. "Ephraim Earle; they say he has come back. Shall I go and see?"

The doctor nodded; it seemed as if he had no words at his command, and the shoemaker, glad to be released, hastened hobbling from the room. As his half bent figure vanished, the doctor, as if released from a spell, looked about, shuddered, grasped the table nearest to him for support, and then burst into a laugh so strange, so discordant, and yet so thrilling with emotion, that had not a dozen men and women been all talking together in the hall it would have been heard and commented on. As it was he was left alone, and it was not till several minutes had elapsed that Mrs. Fanning came rushing in, followed by her dazed and somewhat awestruck husband.

"O doctor, it is true! It is true! I have just seen him; he is standing at the Fisher's corner. Polly is up at the house—You know she was to open it to-day. They say she is more frightened than pleased, and who can wonder? He looks like a weather-beaten tramp!"

"No, no," shouted some one from the room beyond, "like a gentleman who has been sick and who has had lots of trouble besides."

"Come and see him!" called out a shrill voice, over Mrs. Fanning's shoulder. "You used to know him, doctor. Come and see Ephraim Earle."

The doctor, with a curl of his lips, looked up and met the excited eyes that were contemplating him, and slowly remarked:

"Your wits have certainly all gone woolgathering. I don't believe that Ephraim Earle has returned. Some one has been playing a trick upon you."

"Then it's the ghost of Ephraim Earle if it's not himself," insisted the other, as the whole group, losing their awe of the doctor in the interest and growing excitement of the moment, came crowding into the shop.

"And a very vigorous ghost! He is bound to have his rights; that you can see."

"But he won't annoy his daughter. Did you hear what he said to the child, up there by the lilac bushes?" And then they all chattered, each striving to give his or her own views of the situation, till a sudden vigorous "Hush!" brought them all to an abrupt standstill and set them staring at the doctor with wide-open eyes and mouths.

"You are all acting like children!" protested that gentleman, with his white face raised and his eyes burning fiercely upon them. "I say that man is an impostor! Why should Ephraim Earle come back?"

"And why should n't he?" asked another.

"Answer us that, Dr. Izard. Why should n't the man come back?"

"True, true! Has n't he a daughter here?"

"With money of her own. Just the same amount as he once ran off with."

"I tell you again to be quiet." It was still the doctor who was talking. "If you are daft yourselves, do not try to make other people

so! Where is this fellow? I will soon show you he is not the man you take him to be."

"I don't know how you will do it," objected one, as the group fell back before the doctor's advancing figure. "He's as like him as one pea is like another, and he remembers all of us and even chattered with Mother Jessup about her famous worsted socks."

"Fools!" came from beneath the doctor's set lips as he strode from the door and passed rapidly into the highway. "Here, you!" he cried, accosting the man who was the centre of a group some rods away, "come up here! I want to speak to you."

XI.

FACE TO FACE.

THE stranger, thus hailed, turned as the doctor's voice rang down the road, and acknowledging the somewhat rough summons with a bow of mock affability, stepped obligingly up the hill. The neighbors who had flocked into the street to watch the meeting, saw the doctor's lip curl as the wretched figure advanced. This man, Ephraim Earle? Why had he called these credulous creatures fools? They were simply madmen. But in another moment his countenance changed. The miserable fellow had paused and was standing a few feet off with what could not be called other than a look of old comradeship. He spoke first also and with quite a hearty ring to his naturally strident voice.

"Well, Oswald, old boy, this is a pleasure!

Now don't say you don't remember me—" for the doctor had started back with an irrepressible gesture of disgust that to some eyes was not without its element of confusion, "I know I am changed, but no more so than you are, if you have led a more respectable life than I."

"Scoundrel!" leaped from Dr. Izard's white lips. "How dare you address me as if we were, or ever had been, friends! You are a brazen adventurer, and I—"

"And you are the perfectly irreproachable physician with a well-earned fame, and a past as free from shadow as—well, as your face is free from surprise at this unexpected return of one you probably thought dead."

Confounded by this audacity and moved by many inner and conflicting emotions, Dr. Izard first flushed, then stood very still, surveying the man with a silent passion which many there thought to be too emphatic a return for what sounded to them like nothing more than an ill-judged pleasantry. Then he spoke, quietly, but with a sort of gasp, odd to hear in his usually even and melodious voice.

"I do not know you. Whatever you may call yourself, you are a stranger to me, and no stranger has a right to address me with impertinence. What *do* you call yourself?" he suddenly demanded, advancing a step and darting his gaze into the other's eyes with a determination that would have abashed most men whether they were all they proclaimed themselves to be or not.

A playful sneer, a look in which good-natured forbearance still struggled uppermost, were all that he got from this man.

"So you are determined not to recognize Ephraim Earle," cried the stranger. "You must have good reasons for it, Oswald Izard; reasons which it would not be wise perhaps for one to inquire into too curiously."

It was an attack for which the doctor was not fully prepared. He faltered for an instant and his cheek grew livid, but he almost immediately recovered himself, and with even more than his former dignity, answered shortly:

"Now you are more than impertinent, you are insolent. I do not need to have secret reasons for repudiating any claims you may

make to being Polly Earle's father. Your face denies the identity you usurp. You have not a trait of the man you call yourself. Your eyes——"

"Oh, do not malign my eyes," laughed the stranger. "They are faded I know and one lid has got a way of drooping of late years, which has greatly altered my expression. But they are the same eyes, doctor, that watched with you beside the bed of Huldah Earle and if they fail to meet you with just the same mixture of trembling hope and fear as they did then it is because youthful passions die out with the years and I no longer greatly care for any verdict you may have to give."

A frown hard to fathom corrugated the doctor's forehead and he continued to survey in silence the bold face that declined to blench before him.

"So you persist—" he remarked at length. "Then you are a villain as well as an impostor."

"Villain or impostor, I am at least Ephraim Earle," asserted the other; adding as he noted the doctor's fingers tighten on the slight stick he carried, "Oh, you need not show your hatred

quite so plainly, Dr. Izard. I do not hate you, whatever cause I may have to do so. Have I not said that my old passions are dried up, and even signified that my coming back was but a whim? *Curraghven-hoodah*, Oswald, you weary me with your egotism. Let us shake hands and be comrades once more."

The audacity, the superiority even, with which these words were said, together with the cabalistic phrase he used—a phrase which Dr. Izard was ready to swear even at that moment of shock and confusion, was one known only to himself and Polly's father,—had such an effect upon him that he reeled and surveyed the speaker with something of superstitious fear and horror. But at the malicious gleam which this momentary weakness called up in the eye of his antagonist, he again regained his self-command, and stepping firmly up to him, he vociferated with stern emphasis:

"I repeat that you are an impostor. I do not know you, nor do I know your name. You say you are Ephraim Earle, but that is a lie. I knew that man too well to be deceived by you. You have neither his eyes, his mouth,

nor his voice, I will say nothing of his manners."

"Oh," spoke up a voice from behind, "he looks like Ephraim Earle. You cannot say he does not look like Ephriam Earle."

The doctor turned sharply, but his antagonist, who neither seemed to ask nor need the support of any one or anything but his own audacity, responded with a mocking leer :

"No matter what I look like. He says he cannot be deceived by my eyes, my mouth, or my voice. That is good. That sounds like a man who is sure of himself. But friends—" Here his voice rose and the menace which he had hitherto held in abeyance became visible in his sharpened glance—"he can be deceived by his own prejudices. Dr. Izard does not want to know me because he was Huldah Earle's attending physician, and her death, as you all know, was very sudden and *very peculiar*."

Venomous as the insinuation was, it was a master-stroke and won for its audacious author the cause for which he had been battling. The doctor, who had worked himself up into a white

heat, flushed as if a blood-vessel was about to burst in his brain, and drawing back, stepped slowly from before the other's steady and openly triumphant gaze. Not till he reached the outskirts of the crowd, did he recover himself, and then he halted only long enough to cry to the jostling and confused crowd he had just left:

"He looks like a tramp and he talks like a villain. Be careful what credit you give him, and above all, *look after Polly Earle.*"

XII.

AT HOME.

IT was now nearing eight o'clock, and as Dr. Izard strode on through the village streets, seeing no one and hearing no one, though more than one person respectfully accosted him, the twilight deepened so rapidly that it was quite dark when he passed the church and turned up the highroad to his own house.

It was dark and it was chilly, else why should so strong a man as he shiver? So dark that the monuments over the wall were hardly to be discerned, and he had to fumble for the gate he usually found without trouble. Yet when his hand finally fell upon it and he mechanically lifted the latch he did not pass through at once but lingered, almost with a coward's hesitation, finding difficulty, as it seemed, in traversing the dismal path before

him to the no less dismal door beyond and the solitude that there awaited him.

But he passed the gate at last, and groped his way along the path towards his home, though with lingering footsteps and frequent pauses. Dread was in his every movement, and when he stopped it was to clutch the wall at his side with one hand and to push the other out before him as though to ward off some threatening danger, or avert some expected advance. In this attitude he would become rigidly still, and several minutes would elapse before he stumbled on again. Finally he reached his door, and unlocking it with difficulty threw himself into the house, shuddering and uttering an involuntary cry as a spray of the swaying vine clung to him.

Ashamed of his weakness, for he presently saw what had caught him by the arm, he drew a deep breath, and tried to shut the door. But it would not close. Some obstruction, a trivial one no doubt, had interposed to stop it, and he being in an excited state pushed at it with looks of horror, till his strength conquered and he both shut and locked the door.

He was trembling all over when he had accomplished this, and groping for a chair he sat down in it, panting. But no sooner had he taken his seat than the dim panes of the window struck his sight, and bounding to his feet he drew down the shade as if he would shut out the whole world from his view, and the burying-yard first of all.

Quite isolated now and in utter darkness, he stood for a few minutes deeply breathing and cursing his own fears and pusillanimity. Then he struck a light, and calmed by the sight of the familiar interior, sat down at his desk and tried to think. But though he was a man of great intellectual powers, he seemed to find it difficult to fix his thoughts or even to remain quiet. Involuntary shudders shook his frame, and from time to time his eye glanced fearfully towards the door as if he dreaded to see it open and admit some ghostly visitor.

Suddenly he leaped to his feet, went to a mirror and surveyed himself. Evidently the result was not encouraging for he uttered an exclamation of dismay and coming back to the desk, took up a book and tried to read. But

the attempt was futile. With a low cry he flung the book aside, and rising to his feet began to talk, uttering low and fearful words from which he seemed himself to recoil without possessing the power of stopping them. The name of Ephraim Earle mingled often with these words, and always with that new short laugh of his so horrible to hear. And once he spoke another name, but it was said so softly that only from the tears which gushed impetuously from his eyes, could it be seen that it stirred the deepest chords of his nature.

The clock, which lagged sorely that night, struck eleven at last, and the sound seemed to rouse him, for he glanced toward his bed. But it was only to cry "Impossible!" and to cast a hunted look about the room which seemed like a prison to him.

At length he grasped the green door and began to pull at its hasps and fastenings. Careless of the result of these efforts he shook a small heathen god from its pedestal so that it fell rattling to the floor and lay in minute pieces at his feet. But he did not heed. Recklessly he pulled open the door, recklessly he

passed into the space beyond. But once out of the room, once in another atmosphere than that peopled by his imagination, he seemed to grow calmer, and after a short survey of the narrow hall in which he found himself and a glance up the tiny, spiral staircase rising at his right, he stepped back into the office and took up the lamp. Carrying it with him up the narrow staircase he set it down in the hall above, and without looking to right or left, almost without noting the desolation of those midnight halls, he began pacing the floor back and forth with a restless, uneven tread, far removed from his usual slow and dignified gait.

At early morning he was still pacing there.

XIII.

A TEST.

"O Clarke, wait : there is the doctor now." It was Polly who was speaking. She had come as far as the church in her search after Dr. Izard and had just seen him issuing from his own gate.

"He has a bag in his hand ; he is going on one of his journeys."

"No, no," she protested, "I cannot have it." And bounding forward she intercepted the doctor, just as he was about to step into his buggy. "O doctor, you are not going away ; you are not going to leave me with this dreadful trouble ; don't, don't, I pray !" The doctor, who in his abstraction had not noted her approach, started at the sound of her voice, and turning showed her a very haggard face.

"Why," she cried, stepping back, "you are ill yourself."

"No," he answered shortly, drawing himself up in his old reserved manner. "I had but little sleep last night, but I am not ill. What do you want, Polly?"

"O don't you know what I want? You, of all the town, have said he was an impostor! To you then I come as to my only hope; speak, speak, is he not my father?"

The doctor with a side glance at Clarke, who had remained in the background, drew the girl's hand within his arm and led her a few steps away. But it seemed an involuntary movement on his part, for he presently brought her back within easy earshot of her lover.

"He does not look to me like Ephraim Earle,"he was saying. "He has not his eyes, nor does his voice sound familiar. I do not see why any one acknowledges him."

"But they can't help it. He knows everybody, and everything. I—I thought you had some good reason, Dr. Izard, something that would make it easy for me to deny his claims."

"You—" The doctor's sleepless night seemed to have had a strange effect upon him, for he stammered in speaking, he who was always so

cold and precise. "You thought—" he began, but presently broke into that new, strange laugh of his, and urging Polly towards her lover, he addressed his questions to the latter. "Does this man," he asked, "make a serious claim upon the Earle name and its rights?"

Clarke, who was always sensible when in Dr. Izard's presence of something intangible but positive acting like a barrier between them and yet who strangely revered the doctor, summoned up his courage and responded with the respect he really felt.

"Yes," said he; but with a certain reserve, "that is our best reason perhaps for believing him. He promises not to molest Polly, nor to make any demands upon her until she herself recognizes her duty."

The frown which darkened the doctor's face deepened.

"He is a deep one, then," said he, and stood for a moment silent.

"If he is an impostor, yes," assented Clarke; "but Lawyer Crouse, who talked with him half an hour last night, accepted him at once, and

so did Mr. Sutherland." Mr. Sutherland was the Baptist minister.

"The fools!" muttered the doctor, as much in anger as amazement; "has the whole town reached its dotage?"

Clarke, who seemed surprised at the doctor's vehemence, quietly remarked:

"You were Mr. Earle's best friend. If you say that this man is not he, there would of course be many to listen to you."

But the doctor, resuming his accustomed expression, refused an answer to this suggestion, at which Polly's face grew very pale, and she grasped his arm imploringly, saying as she did so:

"I cannot bear this uncertainty, I cannot bear to think there is any question about this matter. If he is my father, I owe him everything; if he is not——"

"Polly,"—The doctor spoke coldly but not unkindly, "marry Clarke, go with him to Cleveland where he has the promise of a fine position, and leave this arrant pretender to settle his rights himself. He will not urge them long when he finds the money gone for which he is striving."

"You bid me do that? Then you *know* he is not my father."

But the doctor instead of answering with the vigorous yes she had expected, looked aside and carelessly murmured:

"I have said that I saw no likeness in him to the man I once knew. Of course my judgment was hurried, our interview was short and I was laboring under the shock of his appearance. But if everybody else in town recognizes him as Ephraim Earle, I must needs think my opinion was warped by my surprise and the indignation I felt at what I considered a gross piece of presumption."

"Then you do not know," quoth poor Polly, her head sinking lower and lower on her breast.

"No," cried the doctor, turning shortly at the word and advancing once more toward the buggy.

But at this move she sprang forward and sought again to detain him.

"But you will not go and leave me in this dreadful uncertainty," she pleaded. "You will stay and have another talk with this man and satisfy yourself and me that he is indeed my father."

But the stern line into which the doctor's lip settled, assured her that in this regard he was not to be moved; and frightened, overawed by the prospect before her, she turned to Clarke and cried:

"Take me home, take me back to your mother; she is the only person who can give me any comfort."

The doctor who was slowly proceeding to his horse's head, looked back.

"Then you don't like my advice," he smiled.

She stared, remembered what he had said and answered indignantly:

"If this poor, wretched, wicked-eyed man is my father—and I should never have doubted it if you had not declared him an impostor before all the town people—then I would be a coward to desert him and seek my happiness in a place where he could not follow me."

"Even if he is as wicked as his looks indicate?"

"Yes, yes, even if he is wicked. Who can say what caused that wickedness."

The doctor, fumbling with the halter, stopped and seemed to muse.

"Did you ever see your father's picture hanging in the old cottage?"

"Yes, I saw it yesterday."

"Did that have a wicked look?"

"I do not think it had a good look." This was said very low but it made the doctor start.

"No?" he exclaimed.

"It made me feel a little unpleasant, as if something I could neither understand nor sympathize with had met me in my father's smile. It made him more remote, and prepared me for the heartless figure of the man who in the next few minutes claimed me as his daughter."

"Strange!" issued from the doctor's lips; and his face, which had been hard to read from the first, became more and more inscrutable.

"My mother, who is as wise as she is gentle, advises Polly to give up the cottage to her father; but not to live in it with him till his character is better understood and his intentions made manifest."

"Then your mother sees this man in the same light as others do?"

"She certainly considers him to be Ephraim

Earle. It is not natural for her to think otherwise under the circumstances."

"I do indeed stand alone," quoth the doctor.

"When I told her," pursued Clarke, "what you had said, she looked amazed but she said nothing to show that she had changed her opinion. I do not think any one was really affected by your words."

Something in the tone in which this was said showed where Clarke himself stood. A bitter smile crossed the doctor's lip, and he seemed more than ever anxious to be gone.

"I shall be away," he said, "several days. When I come back I hope to see this thing settled."

"I hate him," burst from Polly's lips. "I am terrified at my thoughts of him, but in my inner consciousness I know him to be my father, and I shall try and do my duty by him; shall I not, Clarke?"

Clarke, who had felt himself almost unnecessary in this scene, grasped at the opportunity which this appeal gave him and took her tenderly by the arm.

"We will try and do our duty," he corrected, "praying Providence to help us."

And the doctor, with a glance at them both, sprang into his buggy and was driving off when he rose and flung back at Polly this final word of paternal advice:

"He is the claimant; you are the one in possession. Let him prove himself to be the man he calls himself."

Clarke, dropping Polly's arm, sprang after the doctor.

"Wait! one moment," he cried. "What do you call proof? You who knew him so well in the past, tell us how to make sure that his pretensions are not false."

The doctor, drawing up his horse, paused for a moment in deep thought.

"Ask him," he finally said, "to show you the medal given him by the French government. As it has never been found in his house, and as it was useless to raise money upon, he should, if he is Ephraim Earle, be able to produce it. Till he does, I advise you to cherish doubts in his regard, and above all

to keep that innocent and enthusiastic young girl out of his clutches."

And with a smile which would have taken more than Clarke's experience with the world to understand, much less to explain, the doctor whipped up his horse and disappeared down the road towards the station.

XIV.

GRACE.

THE doctor did not return in a few days nor in a few weeks. Two months passed before his gate creaked on its hinges and the word ran through the town, "Dr. Izard is back!"

He arrived in Hamilton at nightfall, and proceeded at once to his office. There was in his manner none of the hesitation shown at his last entrance there, and when by chance he passed the mirror in his quick movements about the room he was pleased himself to note the calmness of his features, and the quiet air of dignified reserve once more pervading his whole appearance.

"I have fought the battle," he quietly commented to himself; "and now to face the new order of things!"

He looked about the room, put a few matters in order, and then stepped out into the green space before his door. Glancing right and left and seeing nobody in the road or in the fields beyond the cemetery, he walked straight to the monument of Polly's mother and sternly, determinately surveyed it. Then he glanced down at the grave it shaded, and detecting a stray leaf lying on its turf, he picked it up and cast it aside, with a suggestion of that strange smile which had lately so frequently altered his handsome features. After which he roamed through the churchyard, coming back to his door by another path. The chill of early September had touched many of the trees about, and there was something like dreariness in the landscape. But he did not appear to notice this, and entered in and sat down at his table with his former look of concentration and purpose.

Evening came and with it several patients; some from need, some from curiosity. To both kinds he listened with equal calmness, prescribing for their real or fancied complaints and seeing them at once to the door. At ten

o'clock even these failed to put in an appearance, and being tired, he was about to draw his shade and lock his door when there came a low knock at the latter of so timid and so hesitating a character that his countenance changed and he waited for another knock before uttering his well known sharp summons to enter.

It came after a moment's delay, and from some impulse difficult for himself to explain, he proceeded to the door, and hastily opened it. A tall, heavily veiled figure, clad in widow's weeds, stood before him, at sight of which he started back, hardly believing his eyes.

"Grace!" he ejaculated; "Grace!" and held out his arms with an involuntary movement of which he seemed next moment ashamed, for with a sudden change of manner he became on the instant ceremonious, and welcoming in his visitor with a low bow, he pushed forward a chair, with mechanical politeness, and stammered with intense emotion:

"You are ill! Or your son! Some trouble threatens you or you would not be here."

"My son is well, and I—I am as well as

usual," answered the advancing lady, taking the chair he offered her, though not without some hesitation. "Clarke is with the horses in front and I have ventured—at this late hour—to visit you, because I knew you would never come to me, even if I sent for you, Oswald."

The tone, the attitude, the whole aspect of the sweet yet dignified woman before him, seemed to awaken an almost uncontrollable emotion in the doctor. He leaned toward her and said in tones which seemed to have a corresponding effect upon her: "You mistake, Grace. One word from you would have brought me at any time; that is, if I could have been of any service to you. I have never ceased to love you—" He staggered back but quickly recovered himself—"and never shall."

"I do not understand you," protested Mrs. Unwin, half rising. "I did not come—I did not expect—" her agitation prevented her from proceeding.

"I do not understand myself!" exclaimed he, walking a step away. "I never thought to speak such words to you again. Forgive me, Grace; you have a world of wrong to par-

don in me; add another mark of forbearance to your list and make me more than ever your debtor." She drooped her head and sitting down again seemed to be endeavoring to regain her self-possession.

"It was for Clarke," she murmured, "that I came."

"I might have known it," cried the doctor.

"He would not speak for himself, and Polly, the darling child, has become so dazed by the experiences of these last two months that she no longer knows her duty. Besides, she seems afraid to speak to you again; says that you frighten her, and that you no longer love her."

"I never have loved her," he muttered, but so low the words were not carried to the other's ears.

"Have you learned in your absence what has taken place here in Hamilton?" she asked.

Rousing himself, for his thoughts were evidently not on the subject she advanced, he took a seat near her and composed himself to listen, but meeting her soft eyes shining through the heavy crape she wore, he said with a slight appealing gesture:

"Let me see your face, Grace, before I attempt to answer. I have not dared to look upon it for fourteen years, but now, with some of the barriers down which held us inexorably apart, I may surely be given the joy of seeing your features once more, even if they show nothing but distrust and animosity toward me."

She hesitated, and his face grew pale with the struggle of his feelings, then her slim white hand went up and almost before he could realize it, they sat face to face.

"O Grace," he murmured; "the same! always the same; the one woman in all the world to me! But I will not distress you. Other griefs lie nearer your heart than any I could hope to summon up, and I do not know as I would have it otherwise if I could. Proceed with your questions. They were in reference to Clarke, I believe."

"No, I only asked if you had kept yourself acquainted with what has been going on in Hamilton since you left. Did you know that Ephraim Earle was living again in the old house, and that Polly is rapidly losing her

fortune owing to his insatiable demands for money?"

"No!" He sprang to his feet and his whole attitude showed distress and anger. "I told her to make the fellow give her a proof, an unmistakable proof, that he was indeed the brilliant inventor of whose fame we have all been proud."

"And he furnished it, Oswald. You mean the medal which he received from France, do you not? Well, he had it among his treasures in the cave, and he showed it to her one day. It was the one thing, he declared, from which he had never parted in all his adventurous career."

"You are dreaming! he never had *that!* Could not have had *that!* It was some deception he practised upon you!" exclaimed the doctor, aghast and trembling.

But she shook her lovely head, none the less beautiful because her locks were becoming silvered on the forehead, and answered: "It was the very medal we saw in our youth, with the French arms and inscription upon it. Dr. Sutherland examined it, and Mr. Crouse says

he remembers it well. Besides it had his name engraved upon it and the year."

The doctor, to whom her words seemed to come in a sort of nightmare, sank into his chair and stared upon her with such horror that she would have recoiled from him in dismay had he been any other man than Oswald Izard, so long loved and so long and passionately borne with, notwithstanding his mysterious words and startling inconsistencies of conduct.

"You do not know why this surprises me," he exclaimed, and hung his head. "I was so sure," he added below his breath, "that this was some impostor, and not Ephraim Earle."

"I know," she proceeded, after a moment, as soon, indeed, as she thought he could understand her words, "that you did not credit his claims and refused to recognize him as Polly's father. But I had no idea you felt so deeply on the subject or I might have written to you long ago. You have some reasons for your doubts, Oswald; for I see that your convictions are not changed by this discovery. What

is it? I am ready to listen if no one else is, for he is blighting Polly's life and at the same time shattering my son's hopes."

"I said—I swore to Polly that I had no reason," he declared, gloomily dropping his eyes and assuming at once the defensive.

But she with infinite tact and a smile he could not but meet, answered softly: "I know that too; but I am better acquainted with you than she is, and I am confident that you have had some cause for keeping the truth from Polly, which will not apply to me. Is there not something connected with those old days —something, perhaps, known only to you, which would explain your horror of this man's pretensions and help her possibly out of her dilemma? Are you afraid to confide it to me, when perhaps in doing so you would make two innocent ones happy?"

"I cannot talk about it," he replied with almost fierce emphasis. "Ephraim Earle and I—" He started, caught her by the arm and turned his white face toward the door. "Hush!" he whispered, and stooped his ear to listen. She watched him with terror and

amazement, but he soon settled back, and waving his hand remarked quietly :

"The boughs are losing their leaves and the vines sometimes tap against the windows like human fingers. You were saying——"

"*You* were saying that Ephraim Earle and you——"

But his blank looks showed that he had neither understood nor followed her. "Were you not good friends?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, oh, yes," he answered hastily; "too good friends for me to be mistaken now."

"Then it is from his looks alone that you conclude him to be an impostor?"

The doctor did not respond, and she, seeming quite helpless to move, sat for a minute silently contemplating his averted face.

"I know you did not talk with him long. Nor have I attempted to do so, yet in spite of everybody's opinion but your own I have come to the same conclusion as yourself, that he is not Polly's father."

The doctor's lips moved, but no words issued from them.

"That is why I press the matter; that

is why I am here to pray and entreat you to save Polly and to save my son. *Prove this man a villain*, and force him to loose his hold upon the Earle estate before Polly's money is all gone!"

"Is it then a question of money?" asked the doctor. "Two months have passed and you are afraid that he will dispose of twenty thousand dollars!"

"He has already disposed of ten of them and the rest——"

"Disposed of ten thousand dollars!"

"Yes, for old gambling debts, pressing matters which Polly could not let stand without shame."

"The wretch!" leapt from the doctor's lips. "Was there no one to advise her, to forbid——"

"You were gone and Clarke was afraid of seeming mercenary. I think the girl's secret terror of her father and her lack of filial affection drove her to yield so readily to his demands for money."

An inarticulate word was the doctor's sole reply.

"And that is not the whole. Clarke's career

is endangered and the prospect of his carrying out his plans almost gone. Mr. Earle—I have called him so—does not hesitate to say that he must have five thousand dollars more by next October. If Polly accedes to this demand, and I do not think we can influence her to refuse him, Clarke will have to forego all hopes of becoming a member of the Cleveland firm, for he will never take her last five thousand, even if she urges him to it on her knees."

"It is abominable, unprecedented!" fumed the doctor, rising and pacing the room. "But I can do nothing, prove nothing. He has been received as Ephraim Earle, and is too strongly intrenched in his position for me to drive him out."

The absolutism with which this was said made his words final; and she slowly rose.

"And so I too have failed," she cried; but seeing his face and noting the yearning look with which he regarded her, she summoned up her courage afresh and finally said: "They have told me—I have heard—that this man made some strange threats to you in parting. Is that the reason why you do not like to inter-

fere or to proclaim more widely your opinion of him?"

The doctor smiled, but there was no answer in the smile and she went vehemently on: "Such threats, Oswald, are futile. No one less sensitive than you would heed them for a moment. You are above any one's aspersion, even on an old charge like that."

"Men will believe anything," he muttered.

"But men will not believe that. Do we not all know how faithfully you attended Mrs. Earle in her last illness, and how much skill you displayed? I remember it well, if the rest of the community do not, and I say you need not fear anything this man can bring up against you. His influence in town does not go so far as that."

But the doctor with unrelieved sadness answered with decision, "I cannot make this man my enemy; he has too venomous a tongue." And she watching him knew that Polly's doom was fixed and her son's also, and began slowly to draw down her veil.

But he, noticing this action, though he had seemed to be blind to many others she had

made, turned upon her with such an entreating look that she faltered and let her hand fall in deep emotion.

"Grace," he pleaded, "Grace, I cannot let you go without one kindly word to make the solitude which must settle upon this room after your departure, less unendurable. You distrust me."

"Does this visit here look like distrust?" she gently asked.

"And you hate me! But——"

"Do I look as if I hated you?" she again interposed, this time with the look of an angel in her sad but beautiful eyes.

"Ah, Grace," he cried, with the passion of a dozen years let loose in one uncontrollable flood, "you cannot love me, not after all these years. When we parted——"

"At whose instigation, Oswald?"

"At mine, at mine, I know it. Do not reproach me with that, for I could not have done differently.—I thought, I dreamed that it was with almost as much pain on your side as mine. But you married, Grace, married very soon."

"Still at whose instigation?"

"Again at mine. I dared not keep you from any comfort which life might have in store for you, and the years which you have spent in happiness and honor must have obliterated some of the traces of that love which bound our lives together fifteen years ago."

"Oswald, Mr. Unwin was a good husband and Clarke has always been like an own son to me, but——"

"Oh," interposed the doctor, starting back before the beauty of her face, "don't tell me that a woman's heart can, like a man's, be the secret sepulchre of a living passion for fifteen years. I could not bear to know that! The struggle which I waged fourteen years ago I have not strength to wage now. No! no! woman of my dreams, of my heart's dearest emotion, loved once, loved now, loved always! tell me anything but *that*,—tell me even that you hate me."

Her eyes, which had fallen before his, swam suddenly with tears and she started as if for protection toward the door.

"Oh, I must go," she cried. "Clarke is waiting; it is not wise; it is not seemly for me to be here." But the doctor, into whom a fiery glow had entered, was beside her before she could reach the threshold. "No, no," he pleaded, "not till you have uttered one word, one whisper of the old story; one assurance—Ah, now I am entreating for the very thing, the existence of which, I deprecated a few minutes ago! It shows how unbalanced I am. Yes, yes, you can go; but, Grace, if you have ever doubted that I loved you, listen to this one confession. Ever since the day we parted, necessarily parted, fourteen years ago, I have never let a week go by till these last few ones during which I have been away from Hamilton, that I have not given up two nights a week to thinking of you and watching you."

"Watching me!"

"Twice a week for fourteen years have I sat for an hour in Mrs. Fanning's west window that overlooks your gardens. Thence, unnoted by everybody, I have noted you, if by happy chance you walked in the garden; and if you

did not, noted the house that held you and the man who sheltered your youth."

"Oswald,"—she felt impelled to speak, "if—if you loved me like this, why did you send me that cruel letter two days after our engagement? Why did you bid me forget you and marry some one else, if you had not forgotten me and did not wish me to release you in order that you might satisfy your own wishes in another direction?"

"Grace, if I could explain myself now I could have explained myself then. Fate, which is oftenest cruel to the most loving and passionate hearts, has denied me the privilege of marriage, and when I found it out——"

"True, you have never married. Cruel, cruel one! Why did you not let me know that you would always live single for my sake; it would have made it possible for me to have lived single for yours."

The doctor with the love of a lifetime burning in his eyes, shook his head at this, and answered: "That would have shown me to be a selfish egotist, and I did not want to be

other than generous to you. No, Grace, all was done for the best; and this is for the best, this greeting and this second parting. The love which we have acknowledged to-night will be a help and not a hindrance to us both. But we will meet again, not very soon, for I cannot trust a strength which has yielded so completely at your first smile."

"Farewell, then, Oswald," she murmured. "It has taken the sting from my heart to know that you did not leave me from choice."

And he, striving to speak, broke down, and it was she who had to show her strength by gently leaving him and finding her own way to the door.

But no sooner had the night blast blowing in from the graveyard struck him, than he stumbled in haste to the threshold, and drawing her with a frenzied grasp from the path she was blindly taking toward the graves, led her from that path to the high road, where Clarke was waiting in some anxiety for the end of this lengthy interview. As the doctor gave her up and saw her taken in charge by her son, he said with a thrilling emphasis not soon to be

forgotten by either of the two who listened to them :

" Try every means, and be sure you bid Polly to try every means, to rid yourselves of the bondage of this interloper. If all fails, come to me. But do not come till every other hope is dead."

PART IV.

A PICKAXE AND A SPADE.

XV.

THE SMALL, SLIGHT MAN.

TWO months had passed and the first snow was whitening the streets of Hamilton. It was falling thick on Carberry hill, up which Clarke Unwin was plodding early one evening on a visit to the Earle cottage.

His errand was one of importance. A crisis was approaching in his affairs and he was determined to settle, once and for all, whether poor Polly's money was to be sacrificed to her father's increasing demands, or whether she could safely be allowed to follow her own wishes and give five thousand dollars of it to

the lover whose future fortunes seemed to depend upon his possession of this amount.

Ephraim Earle had told her with something like a curse that he should expect from her this very sum on the first of the month, but if this demand were satisfied then Clarke's own hopes must go, for his friends in the Cleveland works were fast becoming impatient, and Mr. Wright had written only two days before that if the amount demanded from him was not forthcoming in a fortnight, they would be obliged to listen to the overtures of a certain capitalist who was only waiting for Clarke's withdrawal to place his own nephew in the desired place.

Clarke Unwin had not visited the Earle cottage since Ephraim took up his abode in it. Polly had refused to go there, and he himself felt no call to intrude upon a man who was personally disagreeable to him, and whom he could not but regard as a tyrant to the sweet girl whose life had been all sunshine till this man came into it with his preposterous demands and insatiable desire for money.

On this day, however, he had received her permission to present her case to her father

and see what could be done with him. Perhaps when that father came to know her need he would find that he did not want the money as much as he made out; at all events the attempt was worth trying, and thus it was that Clarke braved the storm on this October night to interview a man he hated.

As he approached the brow of the hill he heard a noise of mingled laughter and singing, and glancing from under his umbrella he perceived that the various windows of the cottage were brilliantly lighted. The sight gave him a shock. "He is having one of his chess and checker orgies," he commented to himself, and demurred at intruding himself at a time so unfavorable. But the remembrance of his mother and Polly, sitting together in anxious expectation of the good effects of his visit, determined him to proceed; and triumphing over his own disgust, he worked his way as rapidly as possible, and soon stood knee-deep in the snow that was piled up before the cottage door. The wind was blowing from the north and it struck him squarely as he raised his hand to the knocker, but though it bit into

his skin, he paused a moment to listen to the final strains of old Cheeseborough's voice, as he sang with rare sweetness a quaint old English ballad.

When it was over Clarke knocked. A sudden pushing back of chairs over a bare floor announced that his summons had been heard, and presently he had the satisfaction of seeing the door open and the figure of Mr. Earle standing before him. Clarke did not wait to be addressed.

"I am Clarke Unwin," he announced. "May I be allowed the pleasure of a few minutes' conversation with you?"

"A *few* minutes," emphasized the other, drawing back with almost too free an air of hospitable welcome. "I hope you will not limit yourself to a *few* minutes, my boy; we have too good company here for that." And without waiting for any demur on the part of his more than unwilling guest, he flung open a door at the right, and ushered him, greatly against his will, into the large parlor where Clarke had last stood with Polly at his side.

Just now it was filled with the choicest of

the convivial spirits in town, most of whom had been playing checkers or chess and smoking till not a face present was fully visible. Yet Clarke, in the one quick glance he threw about him, recognized most if not all of the persons present—Horton by his oaths, which rang out with more or less good-natured emphasis with every play he made, and the three cronies in the corner by various characteristics well known in Hamilton, where these men passed for "the three disgraces."

One person only was a perfect stranger to Clarke, but him he scarcely noticed, so intent was he on his errand and the desire he had of speaking to Mr. Earle alone.

"Hurrah! Come! Here's Clarke Unwin!" shouted a voice from the depths of the smoky pall. "Brought your flute with you? Nobody comes here without some means of entertaining the company."

"Off with your coat; there's snow sticking to it! Uh! You've robbed the room of all the heat there was in it," grumbled old Cheeseborough, whose fretfulness nobody minded because of the good nature that underlay it.

"Freedom Hall, this!" whispered Earle, still with that over-officious air Clarke had noticed in him at the doorway. "Sit with your coat on, or sit with it off; anything to suit yourself; only one thing we insist on—you must take a good glass-full of this piping hot cider before you speak a word. So much for good fellowship. Afterward you shall do as you please."

"I have not come for enjoyment, but business," put in Clarke, waving the glass aside and looking with some intentness into the face of the man upon whose present disposition depended so much of his own happiness and that of the young girl he had taken to his heart.

Earle, who had a secret pride in his own personal appearance which, now that he was in good physical condition, was not without a certain broad handsomeness, strutted back a pace and surveyed Clarke with interest.

"You are looking," said he, "to see how I compare with that picture over your head. Well, as I take it, that picture, though painted sixteen years ago, does not do me justice. What do you think?"

Clarke, somewhat taken aback, as much by the smile which accompanied these words, as by the words themselves, hesitated for a moment and then boldly said :

" What you have gained in worldly knowledge and intercourse with men you have lost in that set purpose which gives character to the physiognomy and fills all its traits with individuality. In that face on the wall I see the inventor, but in yours, as it now confronts me, the——"

" Well, what ?"

" The centre of this very delightful group," finished Clarke, suavely.

It was said with a bow which included the whole assembly. Earle laughed and one or two about him frowned, but Clarke, heeding nobody, asked if he could not have a moment's conversation with his host in the hall.

Earle, with a side glance directed, as Clarke thought, toward the one slight man in the corner whose face was unfamiliar to him, shook his head at this suggestion and blurted out : " That 's against the rules. When the Hail-Fellow-Well-Met Society comes together it is

as one body. What is whispered in one corner is supposed to be heard in the next. Out with your business then, here. I have no secrets and can scarcely suppose you to have."

If this was meant to frighten Clarke off it did not succeed. He determined to speak, and speak as he was commanded right there and then.

"Well," said he, "since you force me to take the town into our confidence, I will. Your daughter——"

"Ah," quoth Earle, genially, "she has remembered, then, that she has a father. She sends me her love, probably. Dear girl, how kind of her on this wintry night!"

"She sends you her respects," Clarke corrected, frankly, "and wants to know if you insist upon having the last few dollars that she possesses."

"Oh, what taste!" broke in the father, somewhat disconcerted. "I did think you would have better judgment than to discuss money matters in a social gathering like this. But since you have introduced the topic you may say to my dutiful little girl that since I have

only asked for such sums as she is perfectly able to part with, I shall certainly expect her to recognize my claim upon her without hesitation or demur. Have you anything more to say, Mr. Unwin?"

Clarke, whose eye had wandered to the stranger in the corner, felt no desire to back out of the struggle, unpleasing as this publicity was. He therefore answered with a determined nod, and with a few whispered words which caused a slight decrease in the air of bravado with which his host regarded him.

"You persist," that individual remarked, "notwithstanding the rules I have had the honor of quoting to you? I should not have expected it of you, Mr. Unwin; but since your time is short, as you say, and the subject must be discussed, what do you advise, gentlemen? Shall I listen to the plea of this outsider—outsider as regards this meeting, I mean, not as regards my feelings toward him as a father—and break our rules by taking him into another room, or shall I risk a blush or two for my charming little daughter's perversity, and hear him out in your very good company and

perhaps, under your equally good and worthy advice?"

"Hear him here!" piped up Cheeseborough, whose wits were somewhat befuddled by something stronger than cider.

"No, no, shame!" shouted Emmons. "Polly is a good girl and we have no business meddling with her affairs. Let them have their talk upstairs. I can find enough here to interest me."

"Yes, yes, there 's the game! Let 's finish the game! Such interruptions are enough to spoil all nice calculations."

"You were making for the king row."

"Checkmate in three moves!"

"Here! fill up my glass first!"

"I declare if my pipe has n't gone out!"

Clarke, who heard these various exclamations without heeding them, glanced at Earle for his decision, but Earle's eye was on the man in the farthest corner.

"Well, we 'll go upstairs!" he announced shortly wheeling about and leading the way into the hall. Clarke followed and was about to close the door behind him when a slim

figure intervened between him and the door, and the stranger he had previously noticed glided into the hall.

"Who 's this?" he asked, noticing that this man showed every sign of accompanying them.

"A friend," retorted Earle, "one of the devoted kind who sticks closer than a brother."

Clarke, astonished, surveyed the thin young man who waited at the foot of the stairs and remarked nonchalantly, "I do not know him." Earle, with a shrug of the shoulders, went upstairs.

"You may have the opportunity later," he dryly remarked; "at present, try and fix your attention on me." They proceeded to the inventor's workroom, where they found a light already burning.

"Sit down!" commanded Earle, with something of the authority which his years, if not his prospective attitude toward the young man warranted. But he did not sit himself, nor did the friend who had followed him upstairs and who now hovered about somewhere in the background. "It will take Emmons just ten minutes to perfect the 'mate' he has threat-

ened," observed Earle as they faced each other. "Can you finish your talk in as short a time? For I must be down there before they start a fresh game."

"Five minutes should suffice me," returned Clarke, "but you may need a longer time for argument. Shall I state just what our situation is as regards this money you want from Polly?"

"If you will be so good!"

"With that man listening in the doorway?"

"With that man listening in the doorway."

"Polly has no money to spare, Mr. Earle. Of the twenty thousand left her you have already had ten——"

"For my just debts, Mr. Unwin."

"For your just debts, granted, Mr. Earle, but those debts were not incurred for her benefit, nor have you ever deigned to particularize to her just what they were."

"I would not burden her young mind."

"No, it has been enough for you to burden her purse."

"I should have burdened her conscience had I neglected to ask for her assistance."

"And will you now, by declining to take away her last hope, allow her the means of retrieving the fortune of which you have so nearly robbed her?"

"Her hopes? Her means? I think you are speaking for yourself, sir."

"In speaking for myself, I speak for her; our interests are identical."

"You flatter yourself; Miss Earle is not yet your wife."

"Would you come between us?"

"God forbid! I am willing that Polly, as you call her, should marry whom she will—when I am dead."

"Or when you have robbed her of every cent she owns."

"Oh, what language! I marvel you have not more delicacy of expression, Mr. Unwin. Your father was noted for his refinement."

"He had not to deal with—" the word was almost out, but Clarke restained himself—"with a man who could forsake his motherless child in her tender years, only to expect unbounded sacrifices from her when she has attained maturity."

"I expect no more than she will be glad to grant. Maida has pride—so have you. You would neither of you like to see her father in jail."

Clarke bounded to his feet.

"We do not imprison men here for debt," he cried.

"No, but you do for theft."

The word, so much worse than any he was prepared for, turned Clarke pale. He looked to right and left and shrank as he caught the eye of the slim watcher in the hall beyond.

"You surely are not a criminal," he whispered. "That man——"

"Never mind that man. Our ten minutes are fast flying by and you do not yet seem to see that I cannot afford to relinquish my hold on Polly."

"Do you mean that your debts——"

"Were incurred in private? Certainly, and under circumstances which place me in a dilemma of no very pleasing nature. If they are not all paid by the first of next month, I shall have to subject my very conscientious little daughter to the obloquy of visiting her

father in prison. It is a shame, but such is the injustice of men."

"You have stolen then?"

"Too harsh a word, Clarke. I have borrowed money for the purpose of perfecting my experiments. The experiments have failed, and the money—well, the man from whom I borrowed it will have it, that is all. He is strict in his views, notwithstanding his long forbearance."

"Who is this man? I should like to talk to him. That fellow behind you is surely not he?"

"Oh, no; he is only a detective."

"A detective!"

"Who likes my table and bed so well he never knows when he has had enough of either."

"Shameful!" sprang from Clarke's set lips, as his eyes flew first to the watchful but nonchalant figure in the hall, and then to the tall, commanding form of the man who could accept his degrading situation with such an air of mingled sarcasm and resignation.

"And you are the man to whom the French government sent her badge of honor!"

"The same, Clarke," tapping his breast.

"And you dare to call Polly your child; dare to return to Hamilton with this disgrace upon you, to make her life a hell and——"

"Maida is my child; and as for this disgrace, as you call it, it will be easy enough for her to elude that; a certain check drawn on her bank and signed by her name will do it."

"I should like to be sure of that," returned Clarke, springing back into the hall and confronting the man who stood there. "If you are a detective," said he, "you are here in the interest of the man whom Mr. Earle has robbed?"

The slight young man, in no wise disconcerted, smiled politely, but with an air of quiet astonishment directed mainly toward Ephraim Earle.

"I am here in the interest of Brown, Shepherd, & Co., certainly," said he. "But I have uttered no such word as robbed, nor will, unless the first of the month shows Mr. Earle's indebtedness to them unpaid."

"I see. In what city does Brown, Shepherd, & Co. do business?"

"In New York, sir."

"Merchants, lawyers, bankers, or what?"

"Bankers."

"Oh, I remember; in Nassau street?"

"Just so."

Mr. Earle, who had taken up a cigar from his table while this short colloquy took place, stepped forward.

"A very strict firm, thorough, and not much given to showing mercy, eh?"

"Not much," smiled the man.

"You see!" gesticulated Mr. Earle, turning to Clarke with a significant smile.

Clarke, with a sudden heartsick sense of what this all meant to him, assumed a stern air.

"Mr. Earle," said he, "I must entreat that you come at once and present this matter to Polly. She ought to know particulars, that she may judge whether or not she will sacrifice her fortune to save you from the disgrace you have incurred."

"What, now, with my house full of guests? Impossible. The affair will keep till to-morrow. I will be down to-morrow and tell her anything you wish."

"She cannot wait till to-morrow. I must send the letter to-morrow which decides my future."

"That 's unfortunate; but you can send your letter all the same. I know what her decision will be."

Clarke felt that he knew too, but would not admit it to himself.

"I have said my say," he remarked. "Either you will let her know your precise position to-night, or I will take it upon myself to ask her for the money for my own uses. She will not deny me, if I press her, any more than she will probably deny you. So take your choice. I am going back to the friends below."

Earle, who had not expected such condign treatment from one whom he had hitherto regarded as a boy, glanced at the detective, and, with the characteristic shrug he had picked up in foreign countries, cried out in somewhat smothered tones, in which caution struggled oddly with his natural bravado:

"Well, we 'll compromise. I cannot leave the H. F. W. M.; but I 'll tell you what I will do. I 'll write out the situation for my daugh-

ter, and you shall carry the paper with you. Won't that do, considering the circumstances, eh?"

Clarke, to whom this man's character was a perfect anomaly, murmured a hesitating consent and hurried down into the room below. Earle followed him, and, entering with frank jocularity, in striking contrast with the other's dejected appearance, he cheerfully called out:

"Well, I 've convinced the boy, somewhat against his will, I own, that a few thousands spent on the invention I have now on hand will bring in a much larger fortune to Maida than that I have perhaps rather recklessly expended. It was just so when I was perfecting my first invention, don't you remember? Every dollar I spent on it was begrudged me, and yet see what an outcome there was to it at last."

"Yes, yes; but where is all that money now?" queried old Cheeseborough, wagging his iron gray head. "Nobody here ever saw a dollar of it, and I have heard people say they don't believe you ever got it."

"Would you bring up the saddest hours of

my life?" asked Earle, with a sudden cloud on his brow. "I got the money, but—" he stopped, shook himself and changed his tone for one of cheerful command. "Here, you! Start a fresh game, Emmons. I see that your checkmate is good. I 've got to write a letter. Who will bet that I won't get my six pages done before Hale will succeed in getting three men into the king row?"

"I will!"

"Put down your dollar then!"

"There it is."

"And there 's mine, with a condition to boot. I 'll write the letter *in this room*, and give Cheeseborough another chance at a song, if you say so."

"Done! Fire away, old man; here goes my first move!"

"And here my first word."

And, to Clarke's mingled surprise and disgust, Earle threw himself down before a table, took up a pen and began to write. Cheeseborough piped up with his thin, sweet voice something between a dirge and a chant, and Horton went on with his oaths.

XVI.

THE LETTER.

WHEN Ephraim Earle had taken up his abode in the cottage on the hill, Mrs. Unwin had moved into a small house on a side street in the lower part of the town. In the cosy parlor of this same house, she was now sitting with Polly, waiting for her son's return.

He had been gone a couple of hours, and both Mrs. Unwin and Polly were listening anxiously for the sound of his step on the porch. Polly, with the impatience of youth, was flitting about the room and pressing her face continually against the icy panes of the window, in a vain endeavor to look out; but Mrs. Unwin, to whom care had become a constant companion during these last months, was satisfied to remain by the fire, gazing into the

burning logs and dreaming of one whose face had never vanished from her inner sight since that fatal evening she had seen it smile again upon her as in the days of her early youth. Yes, she was thinking of him while Polly was babbling of Clarke; thinking of the last sentence he had uttered to her, and thinking also of the vague reports that had come to her from day to day, of his increased peculiarities and the marked change to be observed in his appearance. Her heart was pleading for another sight of him, while her ear was ostensibly turned toward Polly, who was alternately complaining of the weather and wondering what they should do if her father insisted upon having the money, right or wrong. Suddenly she felt two arms around her neck, and rousing herself, looked down at Polly, who in her restlessness had fallen on her knees before her and was studying her face with two bright and very inquiring eyes.

"How can you sit still," the young girl asked, "when so much depends upon the message Clarke will bring back?" Mrs. Unwin smiled, but not as youth smiles, either in sor-

row or in joy, and Polly, moved by that smile, though she little understood it, exclaimed impetuously:

"Oh, you are so placid, so serene! Were you always so, dear Mrs. Unwin? Have you never felt angry or impatient when you were kept waiting or things did not go to your liking?"

The sweet face that was under Polly's steady gaze flushed for an instant and the patient eyes grew moist. "I have had my troubles," admitted Mrs. Unwin, "and sometimes I have not been as patient with them as I should. But we learn forbearance with time, and now——"

"Now you are an angel," broke in Polly.

"Ah!" was Mrs. Unwin's short reply, as she stroked the curly head nestling in her lap.

"Clarke says that whatever happens I must be brave," babbled the forlorn-hearted little girl from under that caressing hand. "That poverty is not so dreadful, and that in time he will win his way without help from any one. But Oh, Mrs. Unwin, to think I might be the means of giving him the very start he needs, and then

to be held back by one—Dear Mrs. Unwin, do you think it wicked to hate?"

The question was so sudden, and the vision of the girl's uplifted head with its flashing eyes and flushed cheeks so startling, that Mrs. Unwin hesitated for a moment, not knowing exactly what to say. But Polly, carried away now by a new emotion, did not wait for any answer.

"Because I am afraid I really hate him. Why has he come into our lives just when we don't want him; and why does he take from us everything we have? If he loved me I could bear it possibly, but he don't even love me; and then—and then—he lives in such a way and spends his money so recklessly! Don't you think it is wrong, Mrs. Unwin, and that I would be almost justified in not giving him everything he asks for?"

"I should not give him this last five thousand, unless he can show you that his need is very great. No one will blame you; you have been only too generous."

"I know, I know, and I am sure you are right, but notwithstanding that, something as-

sures me that I shall do just what he wishes me to. I cannot refuse him—I do not know why, perhaps because he *is* my father."

Mrs. Unwin, whose face had assumed a look of resolution as Polly said this, impulsively stooped and inquired with marked emphasis, "Then you feel—you really feel at last, that he is your father? You have no doubt; no lurking sensation of revolt as if you were sacrificing yourself to an interloper?"

Polly's head sank on her clasped hands, and she seemed to weigh her answer before replying; then she responded with almost an angry suddenness.

"I wish I could feel he is not what he pretends to be, but the villainous impostor Dr. Izard considers him. But I cannot. No, no, I have no such excuse for my antipathy toward him."

Mrs. Unwin leaned back, and her countenance resumed its dreamy expression.

"Then I shall not advise you," said she. "You must follow the dictates of your own conscience."

Polly rose and ran again to the window, this

time with a cry of joy. "He is coming! Clarke is coming! I hear the gate click," and she bounded impatiently toward the door.

In a few minutes she returned with her lover; he had a letter in his hand and he was contemplating her with saddened eyes.

"You will need courage, dear, to read this," said he. "It is from your father and it puts his case before you very clearly—too clearly, perhaps. Your estimate of him was not far from correct, Polly. The story of his past life is not one you can read without shame and humiliation."

"I knew it! I saw it in his face the first time I looked at him. I saw it before. I saw it in his picture. O Clarke, I shrink even from his writing; must I read this letter?"

"I think you should; I think you should know just what threatens us if you refuse him the money."

Polly took the letter.

"You have read it?" she inquired.

But Clarke shook his head.

"I know the nature of its contents, but I did not wait to read the letter. He wrote it in a

roomful of men, under a wager——" Clarke paused; why hurt her with these details? "But what does that matter? It is the facts you want. Come, screw up your courage, dear; or stay, let me read it to you."

She gave him the letter and he read to her these words:

DEAR MAIDA: You wish to know why I want another five thousand dollars after having received a good ten thousand from you already. Well, I am going to tell you. I have two passions, one for mechanical invention and one—I must be candid or this letter will fail in its object—for wild and unlimited pleasure. When I was young I had not enough money to indulge in but one of these instincts, but on the day I saw twenty thousand dollars in my hand, my other passion, long suppressed, awoke, and notwithstanding the fact that your mother lay dying in the house, I resolved to leave the town where I was known as soon as she was decently buried, for as I said to myself, the possession of twenty thousand dollars means the making of a fortune in Monte Carlo, and a maddening good time of it meanwhile.

But twenty thousand dollars do not always bring a fortune, even in Monte Carlo. I lost as well as won and though I had the good time I had anticipated I was not much richer at the end of five years than I was before my first invention was perfected. And then came a struggle. My good times grew fewer and I was forced to

change my name more than once as I drifted from France to Italy and from Italy to Germany, seeking to reinstate myself, but being dreadfully hampered by my taste for the luxuries of life and the companionship of men who were sufficiently good-natured, but not always honest or sincere. At last I awoke to the necessity of action. I had an idea—one that had been floating in my head ever since the perfection of my first invention, and I realized that if I could but develop it practically I was sure to win a greater sum than that I had earned by my first efforts. But to do this it would take money—considerable money, and I had none. Now how could I remedy this defect? I knew but one way—by play. So I began to play for keeps, that is for a capital, denying myself this time and forgetting for once the delights that can be got out of a thousand francs. I saved, actually saved, and becoming strangely prosperous the moment I set a distinct purpose before my eyes, I won and won till I had a decided nest-egg laid up in the leathern bag which I secretly wore tied about my waist. But though this looked well, it did not satisfy me. I wanted thousands and I had but hundreds; so I took a partner who was not above a trick or two and —well, you do not understand these things—but matters went very smoothly with me after this, so smoothly that possibly I might have allowed myself one little glimpse into my old paradise if I had had a little more confidence in my own discretion and had not been afraid of the charms of a spot that swallows a man, neck and crop, if he once plunges his head into it. So for a few months more, I remained firm and grew steadily rich, till the day

came when by an enormous streak of luck I became the owner of the very amount I had calculated it would take to put into operation my new invention.

I was in St. Petersburg when this happened, and for five hours I sat in my garret chamber feasting my eyes upon the money I had acquired, and shutting my ears to every sound from without that summoned me to the one short hour of wild enjoyment I had certainly earned. Then I put the money back into my bag, took the frugal supper I had prepared and went to bed with the determination of rising early and devoting the early hours of the morning to drawing my first plans.

But in that sleep *I forgot the essential idea upon which the whole thing rested.* It went from me as utterly as if it had been wiped out. In vain I prodded my memory and called upon all the powers of earth and air to assist me in my dreadful dilemma. I no more knew where to place the lines I had for years seen clearly before me than if I had never conceived the thing or seen it a completed object in my mind's eye. Success had dampened my wits, or in the long struggle with my second passion I had lost my hold upon the first. The money necessary to elucidate the idea was mine, but I had lost the idea! The situation was maddening.

Fearing the results of this unexpected disappointment upon my already weakened self-control, I fled to my partner, who was a good fellow in the main, and begged him to take and keep for a week my leather bag with its valuable contents, adding that he was not to give it back to me till the seven days were up, even if I en-

treated him for it on my knees. He promised, and greatly relieved I left him for a stroll through the streets. You see I hoped to regain my idea before the week was out. But alas for the weakness of human nature! Instead of keeping my mind upon work, I spent my time in gorgeous rooms hung with mirrors in which was reflected every lovely thing I worshipped. I heard music, and—but why enlarge the vista further? Not having any goal for my energy, I fell, and when I got my money back, I lived another five years of boundless luxury.

When the last dollar went, I fell sick. I was in New York now, calling myself Harold Deane, and I boarded in a humble boarding-house in Varick street where there was one kind woman who looked after me without asking whether I had any money to pay for my keep. I sent fifty dollars to that woman out of the first money you gave me, my dear. Pardon the digression. I merely wished to show you that I am not without gratitude. When I recovered from my delirium and lifted up my head again in this wicked, fascinating world, my mind was clear as a bell and I saw, all in a minute, the machine again, line for line, whose action was to transform trade and make me a millionaire. Though I was too weak to sit up, I called out for pencil and paper, and at the risk of being thought crazy, scrawled a rude outline of the thing I had lost so long from my consciousness and which I held now by such uncertain tenure that I feared to lose it again, if I let the moment go by. This I put under my pillow. But when I awoke from the sleep which followed, the draw-

ing was gone, destroyed by the good woman who thought it the mad scrawling of a delirious man. But this loss did not trouble me at this time, for the image remained clear in my mind and I was no longer afraid of losing it.

But again I had no money, and confident that in this country and in my present condition it would be useless for me to seek it in the old way, I cast about in my mind how to obtain it by work. Reason pointed out but one course. To get into some large business or banking establishment, and after winning the confidence of the moneyed men I would thus meet, to reveal my idea and obtain their backing. But this was no easy matter for a poor wretch like me. My life had left its imprints on my face, and I had neither means nor friends. But I had something else that stood me in good stead. I had audacity and I had wit, together with a sound business instinct as regards figures. And so in time I was successful and was taken into the banking house of Brown, Shepherd, & Co. in Nassau street.

Again I had an incentive toward thrift. For three months I worked for their good-will, and after that for the good of my purse. This latter phrase may not be plain to you, but when you consider the possibilities opened by a banking house to enrich a man accustomed to use his wits,—possibilities so much greater than those afforded by the selfish consideration of a few capitalists with whom one in my position comes in contact,—you can understand me more readily. At the end of that time I had fifteen thousand dollars laid away ; and the company did not even know that they had sustained any

loss. Well, I meant to repay them when I realized my fortune, but—luck has been against me, you know—the sight of the money was too much for me one night, and I forgot everything in a wild spree which lasted just one week.

When it was over and I came to myself I found that I had again forgotten the essential part of my invention, and that the money, which I always carried in the old bag about my waist and which I had never lost sight of before, was also gone, leaving me destitute of everything but the clothes I wore. I was desperate then and thought of killing myself, but I hated blood and have a horror of poison, so I delayed, expecting to go back to the banking house as soon as my appearance would warrant it. But I never went. I received from some unknown friend a warning that my absence had provoked inquiry, and that my reappearance in Nassau street would be the signal for my arrest, so I not only kept away from that part of the city, but left the town as soon as I had money to do so, wandering as far west as Chicago and sinking lower and lower as the weeks went by, till my old trouble gripped me again and I found myself in a hospital, given up for dead. The name by which I was entered there was Simeon Halleck, but I had worn a dozen during my lifetime.

I was regarded by those around me as a stray and by myself as a lost man, when suddenly one night, no matter how, I learned, my little daughter, that you, whose existence I had almost forgotten, was not only alive and well, but likely to become the inheritor of a pretty for-

tune. At this I plucked up courage, conquered my disease and came out of the hospital a well man. Having been known as Simeon Halleck, it was necessary for me now, in order to present myself as Ephraim Earle, to lose my old identity before I assumed my new,—or rather, I should say, my real one. How I did this would not interest you, so I will pass on to the day when, with my beard grown a foot, I ventured into this town and began to look around to see whether there was any place left for me in the hearts of my old friends or in the affections of my child. I found, as I thought—was it rightly?—that I would receive a decent welcome if I returned, and so after a proper length of time I re-entered Hamilton, this time shaven and shorn, and boldly announced my claims and relations to yourself.

The results of this action I am reaping to-day, but while I am happy and cared for, I do not find myself in a position to enjoy the full benefits of my position from the facts, now to be explained, that the police of New York are sharper than I thought, and when I went to Boston, after my first trip to this town, I found myself confronted by an agent of Brown, Shepherd, & Co. They had discovered my theft and threatened me with a term in state prison. My dear, I knew that no daughter with a fortune of twenty thousand dollars would wish to see her father suffer from such disgrace, so I made a clean breast of it and told him all my hopes, and promised if the firm I had robbed would give me three months of freedom I would restore them every penny I had taken from them. As they could hope for nothing if they landed me in jail,

they readily acceded to my request, and I came to Hamilton followed by a detective, and with the task before me of obtaining fifteen thousand dollars from you in three months. Ten of these you have cheerfully given me, but you cavil at the last five.

Will you cavil any longer when you realize that by denying them to me you will land me in prison and brand your future children with the disgrace of a convict grandfather? I would say more, but the time allotted me for writing this letter is about up. Answer it as you will, but remember that however you may writhe under the yoke, you are blood of my blood and your honor can never be disassociated from mine in this world or the next.

Your loving father,

EPHRAIM EARLE.

P. S. I have Brown, Shepherd, & Co.'s written promise that with the payment of this last five thousand, all proceedings against me shall be entirely stopped, and that neither as a firm nor as individuals will they remember that Ephraim Earle and Simeon Halleck are one.

XVII.

MIDNIGHT AT THE OLD IZARD PLACE.

CLARKE knew when he began to read this letter what effect it was likely to have on his own prospects, but he was little prepared for the change it was destined to make in Polly. She, who at its commencement had been merely an apprehensive child, became a wan and stricken woman before the final words were reached; her girlish face, with its irresistible dimples, altering under her emotions till little of her old expression was left. Her words, when she could speak, showed what the recoil of her whole nature had been from the depths of depravity thus heartlessly revealed to her.

"Oh, what wickedness!" she cried. "I did not know that such things could be! Certainly I never heard anything like it before.

Do you wonder that I have always felt stifled in his presence?"

Mrs. Unwin and Clarke tried to comfort her, but she seemed to be possessed of but one idea. "Take me home!" she cried; "let me think it out alone. I am a disgrace to you here; he is a thief and I am the daughter of a thief. Until every cent that he has taken is returned, I am a participator in his crime and not worthy to look you in the face."

They tried to prove to her the fallacy of this reasoning, but she would not be convinced. "Take me home!" she again repeated; and Clarke out of pure consideration complied with her request. She was still living with the Fishers, but when they reached the humble doorstep which had been witness to many a tender parting and loving embrace, Polly gave her lover a strange look, and hardly lingered long enough to hear his final words of encouragement and hope.

"I will see you to-morrow," she murmured, "but I can say no more to-night—no, not one word"; and with something of the childish petulance of her earlier years she partially

closed the door upon him, and then was half sorry for it, when she heard the deep sigh that escaped him as he plunged back into the snow that lay piled up between the house and the gate.

"I am wicked," she muttered, half to herself, half to him; "come back!" but the words were lost in the chilly wind, and in another moment he had reached the street and was gone. Had he looked back he would not have disappeared so suddenly, for Polly, as soon as she thought herself alone, suddenly pushed open the door, peered out and, with a momentary hesitation, slipped out again into the street.

The snow had ceased falling, the moon had come out and was lighting up the great trees that lined either side of the road. Polly cast one look down the splendid but deserted vista, and then with the thoughtless daring which had always signalized her, began running down the street towards that end of the town where the road turns up towards the churchyard. She was guided by but one thought, the necessity of seeing Dr. Izard before she slept. The

thickness of the snow beneath her feet impeded her steps and made the journey seem long to her panting eagerness. She met nobody, but she thought nothing of that, nor did she note that the lights were out in the various houses she passed. Her mind was so full of her purpose that the only fear of which she was conscious was that she would find the doctor away or deaf to her summons. When the tavern was passed and the shadow of the church reached, she drew a deep breath. Only a few steps more and she would be passing the gate-posts in front of the Izard mansion. But how still everything was! She seemed to realize it now, and was struck by the temerity of her action, as the desolate waste of the church-yard opened up before her and she heard, pealing loud above her head, the notes of the great church-clock striking eleven!

But she knew that the doctor never retired before twelve, and the need she felt of an immediate consultation with one who had known her father in his youth, buoyed her up, and dashing on with a shudder, she turned the corner and came abreast with the house she

was bound for. But here something which she saw, first dazed, then confounded her. The house was lighted! The Izard house, which had been vacated for years! Had the doctor found a tenant then without her knowledge, or, led by some incomprehensible freak, had he lighted it up himself?

While she was gazing and wondering, almost forgetting her own purpose in her astonishment at this unwonted sight, there rose a sudden wild halloo behind her, followed by the shouts of drunken voices and the sound of advancing footsteps. The visitors at her father's cottage had reached the main street, and, seeing the lighted mansion, were as much struck by its unwonted appearance as she had been, and were coming down the road for a nearer inspection.

Alarmed now in good earnest, and by a more natural fear than that which had first agitated her, she looked around for a spot to hide in, and, finding none, plunged towards the house itself. What she expected to gain by this move she hardly knew; but once on the porch, and in the shadows of the great pillars

supporting it, she felt easier; and, though she knew this laughing, careless crowd would soon be upon her, she felt the nearness of the life within to be a safeguard, and, stretching out her hand toward the front door, she was amazed to find it yield to her touch.

Under most circumstances this would have frightened her away, or, at least, would have awakened in her the instinct of alarm; but now the illuminated hall, dimly to be seen through the crack she had made, seemed to offer her a refuge, and she rushed in, closing and locking the door behind her. Instantly the desolation of these long disused rooms settled upon her, and she peered down the hall in terror, dreading and half hoping to see some one, she did not care whom, stalk from some of the several rooms on either side. But no one came, and the seeming lack of life in the spaces about her soon grew more terrifying than any appearance of man or woman would have been. The light which lured her into this desolate structure came from a lamp standing on a small table at the rear of the hall, and presently she found herself insensibly

approaching it, having recognized it as one she had often seen in the doctor's study.

But when she had stepped as far as the circular landing opening under the stairs, and noted the little winding staircase leading down from it into the space below, some faint recognition of the fact that this was the way to the doctor's study came over her, and, advancing breathlessly on tiptoe to the railing which guarded this spot, she looked down into the well beneath, and was startled at the gust of wind which met her there, with all the chill of the outside air in it. Was the famous green door below open, and did this wind come from the graveyard ?

She was conscious that she had no right to advance a step farther, and yet she knew that she must find the doctor, if only to throw herself upon his protection. So, with many a qualm and sinking of the heart, she caught up the lamp from the table near by and descended the short spiral, rightfully thinking that it would be wiser to thus flash upon the doctor in a blaze of light rather than to take him by surprise in the darkness. Finding the green

door open, as she had expected, she tried to raise her voice and utter the doctor's name, but articulation failed her. There was something so weird in her position that her usual recklessness failed to support her, and she had hardly the courage to glance into the room before which she stood, though instinct had already told her it was empty.

The wind which had met her at the top of the staircase increased as she descended, and while she was drawing in her breath before it, the light went out in her hand and she was left standing half in and half out of the doctor's study in a condition of helplessness and terror. But this misfortune, while it abashed her, was of decided benefit in the end. For no sooner was this light out than she was met with the glimmering rays of a lantern, shining in from the graveyard without, and knowing this to be an indication of the doctor's whereabouts, she set down the lamp and was advancing with some trepidation toward the door when her ears caught a sound—the most dreadful that could be heard in that place—that of a spade being forced into the icy ground.

Instantly her heart became the prey of a thousand sickening emotions. What was the doctor doing? Digging a grave? Impossible. And yet what else would make a sound like this? Even her usually bold spirit was startled and she shrank at the thought, wishing for Clarke, for her father, for any one to support her and take her out of the horrible, moonlighted spot where homes were being made for the dead in the dark of night.

She could not retreat and she dared not advance, yet she felt that she must settle her doubts by one glimpse of what was going on. Approaching the window she peeped out and saw—Merciful heavens, was that the doctor?—that wild figure clad in a long wool garment which swept to his heels, and digging with such frenzy and purpose that the snow flew from his spade in clouds? She was so absorbed in the sight that it was a moment before she saw that it was her mother's grave he was unearthing and that he was doing this in his sleep. But when she fully realized the awful fact she uttered a low cry of irrepressible dismay, and no longer fearing anything but this

unearthly figure she had chanced upon in the moonlight, she dashed from the spot and fled up the highway, never resting foot or stopping to breathe till she found herself in her own room at home.

Dr. Izard was mad and she alone knew the frightful secret.

XVIII.

A DECISION.

WHEN Dr. Izard rose the next morning it was with a feeling of lassitude and oppression that surprised him. He had received no calls from patients the evening before, nor had he retired any later than usual. Then why this strained and nervous feeling, as if he had not slept? The snow that had fallen so heavily the day before had cleared the air, and the dazzle of sunshine finding its way into his unusually darkened den prepared him for the brilliant scene without. It was not in that direction, however, he first looked, for he was no sooner on his feet than he noticed that the green door which he always kept shut and padlocked was open, and that in the hall beyond a spade was standing, from the lower edge of which a small stream of

water had run, staining the floor where it rested.

What did it mean, and what was the explanation of the dark stains like wet mould on the skirt of the long wool garment that he wore? He looked from one to the other, and the hair rose on his forehead. Summoning up all his courage he staggered to the window and drawing the curtain back with icy fingers, glanced out. Some vandal had been in the graveyard; one of the graves had been desecrated and the snow and mould lay scattered about. As he saw it he realized who the vandal had been, and though no cry left his lips, his whole body stiffened till it seemed akin to the one he had so nearly disinterred in the night. When life and feeling again pervaded his frame he sank into a chair near the window and these words fell from his lips: "My doom is upon me. I cannot escape it. The will of God be done."

The next instant he was on his feet. He dressed himself in haste, shuddering as he bundled up the stained night-robe and thrust it into the blazing fire of the stove. Then he

caught up the spade, and opening the outside door stepped into the glittering sunshine. As he did so he noticed two things, equally calculated to daunt and surprise him. The first was the double row of his own footsteps running to and fro between the step and the heap of dirt and snow beside the monument; and the other, an equally plain track of footsteps extending from the place where he stood to the gate on his left. The former were easily explainable, but the latter were a mystery; for if they had been made by some nocturnal visitor, why were they all directed toward the highway? Had not the person making them come as well as gone? Puzzled and no little moved by this mystery, he nevertheless did not pause in the work he had set for himself.

Crossing in haste to the monument, he began throwing back the icy particles of earth he had dug up in the night. Though he shuddered with something more than cold as he did so, he did not desist till he had packed the snow upon the mould and left the grave looking somewhat decent. A sleigh or two shot by on

the open thoroughfare without while he was engaged in this work, and each time as he heard the bells he started in painful emotion, though he did not raise his head nor desist from his labor. When all was done he came slowly back, and pausing before the second line of footsteps he examined them more carefully.

It was a woman's tread or that of a child, and it came from his own door. Greatly troubled he rushed into the track they had made and trampled it fiercely out. When he reached the gate he stepped into the highway. The steps had passed up the street. But what were these he now perceived in the inclosure beyond the picket fence, going straight to the house and stopping before the front door? They came from the street also, and they pointed inward and not outward. Was he the victim of some temporary hallucination, or had a woman entered the house by the never-opened front door and come out through his office? It seemed incredible, impossible, but bounding up the steps he tried the door, not knowing what he might

have done in the night. He found it locked as usual and drew back confounded, muttering again with stony lips, "My ways are thickening, and the end is not far off."

When he returned again to his office it was to replace the spade in the spot from which he had evidently taken it. This was up the spiral staircase, in a small shed adjoining the large rear hall, and as he traversed the path he had unconsciously trodden twice in the night, he tried to recall what he had done under the influence of the horrible nightmare which had left behind it such visible evidences of suffering. But his consciousness was blank regarding those hours, and it was with a crushing sense of secret and overhanging doom that he prepared for his daily work, which happily or unhappily for him promised to be more exacting than usual.

A dozen persons visited his office that morning, and each person as he came glanced over at the monument and its disturbed grave. *Had any whisper of the desecration which had there taken place found way to the village?* The doctor quailed at the thought, but his manner gave no sign of his inner emotion.

He was even more punctilious than usual in his attention to the wants of his visitors, and did not give them by so much as a glance of his eye an opportunity for question or gossip. At eleven o'clock he went out. There was a very sick child at the other end of the town and he could reach it only by passing the Fisher cottage. It had been taken ill at daybreak and word had been brought him by a passing neighbor. He had hopes, though he hardly acknowledged them to himself, that some explanation of the footsteps which disturbed him would be found in the sickness of this child. But when he reached the Fisher house the sight of Polly's disturbed face, peering from the parlor window, assured him that the cause of his trouble lay deeper than he had hitherto feared. The discovery was a great shock to him, and as he went on his way he asked himself why he had not stopped and talked to the girl and found out whether she had been to his house or not the night before, and if so, what she had seen.

But that he did not dare to do this was apparent even to himself; for after he had prescribed for his little patient he found

himself taking another road home, a road which led him through frozen fields of untrodden snow, rather than run the risk of encountering Polly's face again, with those new marks upon it of aversion and fear. When he re-entered his own gate it was with bowed head and shrunken form. His short walk through the village, with the discovery he had imagined himself to have made, cost him ten years of his youth. On his table there lay a letter. When he saw it a flush crossed his cheek and his form unconsciously assumed its wonted air of dignity and pride. It was from *her* and the room seemed to lose something of its habitual gloom from its presence. But its tenor made him grow pale again. The letter read as follows:

DEAR FRIEND: Clarke has tried every available means to avoid the result we feared, but as you will see from the inclosed letter from Ephraim Earle, Polly has but one course before her, and that is to give her father what he demands. She has so decided to-day, and if you see no way of interfering, the money will be paid over by nine o'clock to-morrow morning. This means years of struggle for Clarke. You bade us not to apply to you till every other hope failed. We have reached that point. Faithfully yours,

GRACE UNWIN.

XIX.

TO-MORROW.

POLLY had spent an unhappy day. Her secret—for so she termed her discovery of the night before—weighed heavily upon her, and yet she felt it was impossible to part with it, even to Clarke. Some instinct of loyalty to the doctor who had been almost a parent to her influenced her to silence, though she was naturally outspoken and given to leaning on those she loved. She was sitting in the parlor, her back to the window. She had seen the doctor pass once that day and she did not want to meet his eye again. Fear had taken the place of reverence, and confidence had given way to distrust.

Suddenly she heard a door open, and rose up startled, for the sound was in the front hall and the family were all in the kitchen. Could

it be Clarke returning, or her father, or—she had not time to push her conjectures further, for at this point the door of the room in which she stood swung quickly open and in the gap she saw Dr. Izard, with a face so pale that it reminded her of the glimpse she had caught of him the previous night. But there was purpose instead of the blank look of somnambulism in his eyes, and that purpose was directed toward her.

"Polly," he said, not advancing, but holding her fascinated in her place by the intensity of his look, "do not allow yourself to be constrained to sign any check to-day. To-morrow you will no longer consider it your duty." And before she could answer or signify her assent he was gone, and the front door had shut after him. The deep breath which escaped her lips showed what that one moment of terror had been to her. Springing to the window she looked out and started as she saw him take the direction of Carberry hill.

"He is going to see my father," she murmured, and moved by a new terror she seized

her hat and coat, and ran, rather than walked, to Mrs. Unwin's cottage. "Where is Clarke?" was her breathless demand as she rushed impetuously into the house. "Dr. Izard is on his way to Carberry hill and I am afraid, or rather I know, there is going to be trouble between him and my father."

"Then Clarke will prevent it. Dr. Izard sent him word an hour ago to meet him there at five o'clock, and he has been gone from the house just five minutes."

"Oh, what is going to happen? I must see; I must go. They do not know Dr. Izard as well as I do." And without waiting to explain her somewhat enigmatical sentence she dashed from the house and took her way up Carberry hill.

It was the first time she had been there since she was surprised at her father's door by that father's fatal and unexpected return; and had it not been for the excitement under which she was laboring, her limbs would have faltered and her whole soul quailed at the prospect. But love lent her wings, and a certain dogged persistence in duty which underlay the natural

effervescence of her spirits kept her to her task, and so before she realized it she was at the top of that haunted hill and on the door-step of the house which was even more repellent to her now than when the moss hung from the eaves and the seal of desolation lay upon the door.

Hearing from within the voices that she knew, she waited to give no summons, but opened the door and passed in. Three men were in the hall—Dr. Izard, Ephraim Earle, and Clarke—and from the faces they turned toward her she judged that she was not a minute too soon.

"Polly!" leaped simultaneously from the lips of her lover and from those of Dr. Izard. But the one spoke in a sort of tender surprise and the other with a mixture of anger and constraint.

"Do not mind me," she said. "I saw you coming here, and I felt that I ought to be present." And the determination in her face startled those who had always regarded her as a petted child. Her father, who was the only person there who seemed at all at his ease, smiled and gave her a sarcastic bow.

"This is the first time you have honored me," he observed, and pushed a chair slightly forward. "Women are proverbially fond of controversy; why deny this very young girl, the privilege of hearing our little talk?"

The doctor, who perhaps saw more in this intrusion than the others, hesitated for a moment, with his brows lowered over his uneasy eyes, then he waved his hand as if dismissing a subject of no importance, and without saying yea or nay to the appeal which had just been made to him, he cried out in a set and desperate voice:

"I have borne with this impostor long enough. I do not know who you are," he continued, pointing imperatively at the man before him, "but that you are not Ephraim Earle is certain. Therefore you shall no longer enjoy Ephraim Earle's rights or profit by the money which was given to Polly for a very different purpose."

Earle, thus attacked, first raised his brows and then smiled suavely. "You would force an issue then," he cried. "Very well, I 'm ready. Why am I not Ephraim Earle, Dr.

Izard? You assert the fact, but that is not proving it. When we were young men together you were not wont to stop at assertion."

"We were never young men together. You are a stranger to the town, a stranger to me. The letter which you wrote may deceive Polly, may deceive Clarke, may deceive every one else who reads, but it does not deceive me. What is this new invention you failed to project? Tell us on the spot or I will brand you as a wholesale deceiver up and down the town."

"I——" the man stammered, his bold effrontery failing him for the moment.

"Have you forgotten it *again?*" sneered the doctor, seeming to grow taller and broader as his antagonist dwindled. "I expected you would hide behind that excuse. It is a convenient one. You *have* forgotten it; well, we will let that pass and you shall tell me instead why your first one failed to operate the first time you tried it."

"I will not," shouted Earle, driven apparently to bay. "That it did fail you remember and so do I, but after fourteen years devoted to other subjects I am not going to try and

pick up those old threads again and explain to you every step by which I won success at last."

"But I will wait," suggested the doctor. "You shall not be hurried; there is nothing more important to be done in town just now."

"Is n't there? I think there is, Dr. Izard. You have shown yourself my enemy ever since I came to Hamilton; but for reasons that were satisfactory to me I have let it pass, as you have let my so-called imposture pass. I did not wish to stir up old grievances; but you attack me and must expect to be yourself attacked. Of what complaint did Huldah Earle die? Answer me that! Or I will brand *you* for a——"

"Hush!" The word sprang from Clarke, who had seen the doctor cower, as if some awful weight were about to be heaved upon him. "Weigh your words, Mr. Earle; for if you utter an untrue one you shall be brought to dearly rue it."

"I will weigh them," answered the other, growing taller in his turn as the doctor shrank before him; "weigh them in the balance of this respected man's innocence. Look at his

whitening cheek, his trembling form! If he could mention the complaint which carried my wife away in the flower of her youth, do you think he would hesitate and turn pale before her child? Or perhaps *he* has forgotten; it is fourteen years ago, and as I have taken refuge in that excuse, why not he?"

"O God!" burst from Polly's lips; "what horror is this?"

But the doctor, goaded by this last sting, had roused himself. "I have not forgotten," said he. "I forget nothing; not even the slight discoloration which always disfigured Ephraim Earle's left eye, and which is absent from yours. But I do not know the exact cause of Mrs. Earle's death. I never knew. If you were her husband, you would remember that I several times declared I was working in the dark, and even after she was dead acknowledged myself to have failed in my diagnosis, and wished you had called down physicians from Boston."

"Oh, I remember; but I was not deceived then by your humility, nor am I deceived by it now. I will have her body dug up. I will—"

"Oh, no! no!" shrieked Polly, thrusting out her hands before her eyes. "I—cannot—bear—this. I—I do not think the doctor can bear this. Look at him! He is not sane! He——"

"Hush, Polly! I am sane enough," came from the doctor with a sternness which was but the result of his overpowering emotion. "If I show agitation it is because dreadful memories have been awakened and because I must yet press hard against this most audacious man. Fellow! where do you think the money came from which you have been expending so freely to keep yourself out of jail?"

"Ah! that is another small mystery with which I have thought it best not to concern myself."

But even while speaking he drew back, and a change passed over his bold countenance. Looking at the doctor with a strange and lingering gaze, he darted to a small rack at the end of the hall, and, tearing down a cloak and an old slouch hat, he thrust the one upon the doctor's head and the other about his shrinking shoulders. Then he drew back and surveyed

him. Suddenly he struck his forehead, and a triumphant smile, which was not without an evil glare in it, lit up his features.

"Of course!" he cried, "I might have known it! You are the fellow who visited the Chicago hospital that night and who——"

"And you are No. Thirteen!" was the quick response; "the man given over for dead! Oh, I see how you came to be here. Rascal! Villain!"

"Doctor, allow me to return the compliment. Why did you use such subterfuges to transfer a fortune into my daughter's hands? Was it from a good motive or because you felt yourself guilty of her parent's death, and so sought to make amends without awakening suspicion?"

"I should have whispered *ten* thousand dollars into your ear instead of one," muttered the doctor, lost in contemplation of the other's duplicity.

"I would have given no more sign for ten than for one," answered Earle. "Remember, I had just heard of an unknown sum bequeathed to my daughter, and the larger the

hush money offered the greater would the fortune have appeared."

Clarke, to whom these words were well nigh unintelligible, consulted Polly's countenance, and seemed to question what she thought of them. But she was gazing at the doctor, wonder and repugnance in all her looks.

"Oh, do you mean that even this money is not all my own? That it is not the gift of a stranger, but has come, in some incomprehensible way, from *him?*"

The doctor, stung by her tone, turned toward her, saw the slender finger pointing accusingly at him, and drooped his head with a gesture of despair.

"Does it lose its value," he asked, "because it represents the labor and privations of twenty busy years?"

"Does it represent anything else?" she protested. "Why should you give money to me?"

"I cannot answer; not here. To-morrow at your mother's grave I will. Come yourself, let your neighbors come, only see that one person is kept away. Years ago I loved Grace

Hasbrouck, and I would not have her the witness of my shame. Keep her away, Clarke! My task would be too difficult were she there."

Clarke, to whom this avowal was a revelation, stammered and bowed his head. Mr. Earle softly smiled.

"Then you avow—" he began.

But the doctor turned upon him and thundered, "I avow nothing. I merely wish to prove to this town that you are an impostor, and I will do it to-morrow at seven at Huldah Earle's grave. You are a bold man and a quick one, and have learned your lesson well. But there is one thing before which you must succumb and that is the presence of the true Ephraim Earle."

"And you will produce him?"

"I will produce him."

"And in such haste?"

"Yes, in such haste."

There was something so astounding in this threat and in the resolve with which it was uttered that not only Clarke Unwin recoiled, but the hardy adventurer himself showed momen-

tary signs of quailing. But he quickly recovered himself, and glancing at Polly, who stood clinging to Clarke, white as a wraith in her terror and amazement, cried aloud: "Now I know you for a madman. Being Ephraim Earle myself, and innocent of any deeper crime than the one I have frankly acknowledged to you, I can afford to meet my double, even at my poor wife's grave. Doubtless he will be a very good semblance of myself, and my only wonder is that the doctor has not produced him sooner."

"Laugh, laugh!" repeated the doctor, in a terrible voice, "for to-morrow you will be in prison." And stalking by them all, he proceeded to the door, where he paused to say in a voice whose solemn tones rang long in their ears, "Remember! to-morrow morning at seven in the churchyard." And he was gone.

A silence which even the dazed adventurer dared not break followed this startling exit. Then Polly, in a quivering voice, murmured below her breath, "He is mad! I knew it before I came here. Pray Heaven that he has not been made so by crime."

At these words, so unexpected and so welcome to the man whose position had been thus violently threatened, Earle lifted his head and cast a reassured look about him.

"Stick to that, my daughter," he muttered, "stick to that; it is the only explanation of his conduct;" and walking down the hall he added in a subdued tone, as he passed the hitherto unnoticed figure of a man standing in the rear passage, "I will still have the five thousand dollars! Nothing that this madman can do will hinder that."

XX.

DR. IZARD'S LAST DAY IN HAMILTON.

IT was fortunate that there was no serious sickness in Hamilton that night, for the new physician was out of town and Dr. Izard inaccessible. Ever since nightfall there had been a rush of people to the latter's gate, the news having already spread far and wide that the doctor had lately shown signs of mania, during which he had invited the whole town to come to the cemetery the following morning, there to witness, they scarcely knew what, but something strange, something which would turn the public mind against Ephraim Earle, whom he had once before, as all remembered, accused of being an impostor. But they found the gate padlocked, and so were obliged to content themselves with hanging over the cemetery wall and catching what

glimpses they could of the doctor's light which shone clear but inhospitable from his open window. Not till the great clock struck twelve did the curious crowd separate and straggle away to their respective homes.

Meanwhile what was the doctor doing? We, who have penetrated more than once into his silent room, will do it once again and for the last time. We shall not see much. The doctor, whose face shows change, but not so much as one would expect, sits at his table writing. The name of Grace is at the top of the page over which he bends, and the words are few beneath, but they seem to be written with his heart's blood; for in signing them he gives vent to one irrepressible sob—he the man whose sternly contained soul had awed his fellow-men for years and held all men and women and children back from him, as if his nature lacked sympathy for anything either weak or small. The night was far advanced when he folded this letter, directed it, and laid it face up on his desk. But though he must have been weary, he cast no glance at the settle in the dim corner of the room, but began to ar-

range his effects, clear his drawers, and put in order his shelves, as if preparing for the curiosity of other eyes than those which had hitherto rested so carelessly upon them.

There was a fire lighted in the stove, and into this he thrust some papers and one or two insignificant objects which it seemed a strong effort to part from. As the blaze leaped up he cringed and partially turned away his head, but soon he was again amongst his belongings, touching some with a loving hand, others with a careless one, till the church clock, striking two, proclaimed that time was passing hurriedly. At this reminder he dropped the book he had taken up and passed to the green door. It was locked, as usual, but he speedily undid the fastenings, and carrying a lamp with him, stepped through the opening and up the spiral staircase. One of the steps creaked as he pressed it, and he sighed as he heard the familiar sound, possibly because he did not expect to hear it again. When in the hall he set down the lamp, but soon took it up again and began visiting the rooms. They had always been well looked after, and were

neither unsightly nor neglected in appearance, but they seemed to have a painful significance for him as he looked, lamp in hand, from the open doorways. In this one his mother had stood as a bride, with her young friends around her, most of whom were laid away in the graveyard, which was never long absent from his thoughts. How he had loved to hear her tell about that night, and the dress which she wore, and the compliments she received, and how it was the happiest night of her life, till he came—her little child—to make every night joyful. Ah, if she could have foreseen—if she had lived! But God was good and took her, and he of all his family was left to meet the doomful hour alone. In the room he now entered he had played as a boy, such merry plays, for he was a restless child and had a voice like a bell rung in the sunshine. Was that golden-haired, jovial little being who ran up and down these floors like mad and shouted till the walls rung again, the earnest of himself as he appeared at this hour shuddering in the midnight darkness through the empty spaces of this great house? And this little nook here,

the dearest and most sacred of all in his eyes —could he bear to look at it with this crushing weight upon his heart and the prospect of to-morrow looming up in ghostly proportions before him, darkening every spot at which he gazed ?

Yes, yes ; for here all that there has ever been of sweetness in his miserable life, all that there is of hope in that great world to come, centres and makes a holy air about him. Here *she* sat one day, one memorable, glorious day, with the sunshine playing on her hair and that sweet surprise in her look which told him more plainly than the faltering yes on her tongue that his presumptuous love was returned, and that life henceforth promised to be a paradise to him. Ah, ah, and he had not been satisfied ! He must needs be a great physician too, greater than any of those about him, greater than the great lights of Boston and New York, and so—But away with such thoughts ; it is not morning yet and this night shall be given up to sweeter memories and more sacred farewells.

Stooping he knelt where she had sat, and put

his hands together as in childhood's days and prayed, perhaps for the first time in years; prayed as if his mother was overhearing him. Did he pray alone? Was not she praying too in that shabby little room of hers, so unworthy of her beauty and yet so hallowed by her resignation and her love?

Ah, yes, she was praying there to-night, but what would she be doing there to-morrow? He uttered a cry as the thought stung him, and springing passionately to his feet went on and on, avoiding but one place in the whole house and that was where a little door led down to the cellar, at the side of the spiral staircase. When all was done he paused and said his last farewell. Who would walk these lonely halls after he had vanished from them? Upon whom would these mirrors look and in whose hearts would the mystery of this place next impress itself? There was no prophet present to lift the veil, and dropping his chin on his breast the doctor descended the stairs and betook himself again to his desolate den.

The stars were shining brightly over the graveyard as he reseated himself at his desk,

There were no signs of advancing morning yet, and he could dream, dream yet that he was young again and that Grace's voice was in his ear and her tender touch on his arm, and that life was all innocence and hope, and that yon loud resounding clock, too loud for guilty men, rang with some other sound than that of death, doom, and retribution.

Letting his head fall forward in his hands he sat while the dreary hours moved on, but when the clock struck six he raised his forehead and facing the churchyard waited for the first coming streaks of light. And sitting so and waiting so we get our last glimpse of him before the hubbub and turmoil of the day set in, with the curious gaping crowd on the highway and the group among the graves, asking why the doctor had not come out, and why the sexton was the first to appear on the scene, and why he bore a pickaxe and a spade and looked as solemn as if he were going to dig a grave for the dead.

Seven o'clock had not struck, but Ephraim Earle was there, and Clarke and little Polly, crouching in terror behind her mother's tomb;

and a physician was there too, summoned from Wells by Earle, some said, that there might be a competent person on hand to look after the doctor should he prove to be, as more than one person intimated, the madman he appeared; and Dr. Sunderland was there, the good minister; and Mr. Crouse, who had had Polly's matters in charge, and every one but the true Ephraim Earle, whom the doctor had promised to produce.

But then it was not yet seven and Dr. Izard had said seven; and when the hour did at last strike then every peering eye and straining ear became instantly aware that his door had opened and that he stood on the doorstep cold and silent, but *alone*.

"Where is the true Ephraim Earle you talked about? You promised to bring him here! Let us see him," shouted a voice, and the whole crowd that was pushing and elbowing its way into the graveyard echoed as with one voice: "Let us see him! let us see him!"

The doctor, perfectly unmoved, stepped down from the threshold and came toward them quietly, but with a strange command in

his manner. "I shall keep my word," said he, and turned to the sexton. "Dig!" he cried, and pointed to a grave at his feet.

"Wretch! madman!" screamed Earle, "would you desecrate my wife's grave? What do you mean by such a command?"

"You threatened to do this yourself but yesterday," the doctor returned, "and why do you hesitate to have it done by me?" And he again cried to the hesitating sexton, "Dig!" and the man, understanding nothing, but driven to his work by the doctor's fierce eye and unfaltering lip, set himself to the task.

"Oh, what is he going to show us? Do not, do not let him go on," moaned Polly. "I own this man to be my father; why do you let this terror go on before our eyes?"

"This man whom you are ready to own as your father has called me the murderer of his wife," retorted the doctor. "I can only refute it by showing him the contents of this grave. Go on!" he commanded, with an imperative gesture to the sexton, "or I will take the spade in my own hands."

"Ah, he has done that once before!" mut-

tered Polly. "He is mad! Do you not see it in his eyes?"

The doctor, whose face had the aspect of marble, but who otherwise was quite like himself in his best and most imposing mood, turned upon Polly as she said this, and smiled as only the broken-hearted can smile when confronted by a pitiful jest.

"Is there a physician here?" he demanded. "Ah, I see Dr. Brotherton. You are in good time, I assure you, doctor. Feel my pulse and lay your hand on my heart, and answer if you think I have my wits about me and know what I say when I declare that only by investigating this grave can the truth be known."

"I do not need to do either, doctor. I know a sane man when I see him, and I must acknowledge that there are few saner than you."

A flush for the first time crept into Ephraim Earle's hardy cheek; he shifted restlessly on his feet, and his eyes fell with something like secret terror upon the hole that was fast widening at his feet.

"I believe you two are in league," he cried;

"but if Dr. Izard can prove himself innocent of the charges I have made against him, why, he is welcome to do so, even at the cost of my most sacred feelings."

"When you strike the coffin, let me know," said the doctor to the sexton. At these words a dreadful hush settled over the whole assemblage, in which nothing could be heard but the sound of the spade. Suddenly the sexton, who was by this time deep in the hole he was making, looked up.

"I have reached it," he said.

The doctor drew in his breath and turned livid for a moment, then he cast a strange look away from them all across the deserted town, and seeming to gather strength from something he saw there, he motioned the sexton to continue, while he said aloud and with steady emphasis :

"This man who confronts you at my side is not Ephraim Earle, because Ephraim Earle lies buried here!" and scarcely waiting for the anxious cries of astonishment evoked by these words to subside, he went rapidly on to say : "Fourteen years ago he died by my hand on

this spot and was buried by me in this grave. God forgive me that I have kept this deed a secret from you so long."

The tumult which took place at this avowal was appalling. Men and women pushed and struggled till the foremost nearly fell into the grave. Polly shrieked and fell back into the arms of Clarke, while he who had been called Earle shrank all at once together and looked like the impostor he was. Dr. Izard alone retained his self-possession, the self-possession of despair.

"Listen," he now cried, awing that tumultuous mass into silence by the resonant tones of his voice and the gesture which he made toward the now plainly-to-be-seen coffin. "It was not a predetermined murder. I was young, ambitious, absorbed in my profession and eager to distinguish myself. His wife's case was a strange one. It baffled me; it baffled others. I could see no reason for the symptoms she showed, nor for the death she died. You know the truth; to sound the difficulty and make myself strong against another such a case was but the natural wish of so young and

ambitious a man ; but when I asked Ephraim for the privilege of an autopsy he denied it to me with words that stung and inflamed me till what had been a natural instinct became an overmastering passion, and I determined that I would know the truth concerning her complaint if I had to resort to illegal and perhaps unjustifiable means. Her grave—you are standing by it—was made near, very near my office, and when the mound was cleared and the mourners had departed, my way looked so plain before me that I do not think I so much as hesitated at the decision I had formed, dreadful as it may seem to you now. When midnight came,—and it was a dismal night, the blackest of the year,—I stole out into this spot and began my unhallowed work. I had no light, but I needed none, and strange as it may seem, I reached the coffin-lid in an hour, and stooping down began to wrench it open, when suddenly I heard a step, then a murmur and then a short, fierce cry. The husband had suspected me and was there to guard his dead.

" Leaping from the grave, I confronted him

and a short, wild struggle ensued. He had thrown himself upon me in anger, and I, with the natural instinct of self-preservation, raised my spade and struck him, how surely I did not know at the moment. But when silence followed the struggle and a heavy fall shook the ground at my feet, I began to realize what I had done, and throwing myself upon the prostrate body, I laid my hand upon the heart and my cheek to the fast-chilling lips. No action in the one, no breath upon the other; Ephraim Earle was dead, and I, his murderer, stood with his body at my feet beside his wife's wide-opened grave.

"I had never known terror till that hour, but as I rose to my feet, comprehending as it were in an instant all that lay before me if his dead body was found at my door, the subtleness of the criminal entered into me, and springing back into the grave I tore poor Huldah's corpse from its last resting place, thrust her husband's scarce cold body into her coffin, and pushed down the lid. Then I shovelled in the earth, and when all was done, I carried her poor remains into the house and buried them

beneath the cellar floor, where they are still lying. And now you know my crime and now you know my punishment. Three months ago this man came into town and announced himself as Ephraim Earle, and marking the havoc he has made with the happiness of our innocent Polly, I have felt myself driven step by step to make this dreadful avowal. Now look into this grave for yourselves, and see if all that I have told you is not true."

And they did look, and though I need not tell you what they saw, there was no more talk in Hamilton of any lack of sanity on Dr. Izard's part, nor did any man or woman thereafter speak again of the adventurer by the name of Ephraim Earle.

When the first horror was over and people could look about them once more, the doctor's voice was heard for the last time.

"When this man—who, as you see, would like to escape from this place, but cannot—came with his bravado into town, I told Polly that before she accepted his assertions as true, she should exact from him some irrefutable proof of his identity, and mentioned the medal

that had been given to her father by the French government. This was because the medal had not been found after his disappearance, and I thought it must have been upon his person when he was thrust into the grave. But to my horror and amazement, this fellow was able to produce it,—where found or how discovered by him I cannot tell. But he has never given evidence of having the money which accompanied the medal. Search, then, my friends, and see if it cannot be found among this dust, and if it can, give it to Polly, whom I have in vain endeavored to recompense for this loss, which was involuntary on my part and which has always been to me the most unendurable feature of my crime."

A cry of surprise, a shout of almost incredulous joy, followed this suggestion, and Mr. Crouse held up to sight a discolored, almost indistinguishable pocketbook, which some one had the courage to pull out of the coffin. Then another voice, more solemn and methodical than any which had yet spoken, called out: "Let us kneel and give thanks to God, who remembers the fatherless

and restores to the orphan her rightful patrimony."

But another voice, shriller and more imperative still, put a stop to this act of devotion.

"Dr. Izard has confessed his sins, and now let the impostor confess his. Who are you, man, and how happens it that you know all our ways and the whole history of this town?" And Lawyer Crouse shook the would-be Earle by the arm and would not let him go till he answered.

"I am—" the old bravado came back, and the fellow for a moment looked quite reckless and handsome. "Ask Tilly Unwin who I am," he suddenly shouted, breaking into a great laugh. "Don't you remember Bill Prescott, all you graybeards? You used to hustle with me once for a chance at her side at singing school and dance; but you won't hustle any longer, I am ready to swear; the lady's beauty is not what it was." And with this unseemly jest he whirled about on one heel and gave his arm to a slim, light-complexion young man whom few had noticed, but who at no time had stepped far away from his side.

The cry of "Phil! It is Phil, the scapegrace who was said to be dead a dozen years ago," followed him out of the yard; but he heeded nobody, his game was over, and his last card, a black one, had been played.

And Dr. Izard? When they thought of him again, he was gone; whither, no one knew, nor did it enter into the heart of any one there to follow him. One person, a heavily draped woman, who had not entered the graveyard, but who had stood far down the street during all that dreadful hour, thought she saw his slight form pass between her and the dismal banks of the river; but she never rightly knew, for in her mind's eye he was always before her, and this vision of his bowed head and shrunken form may have been, like the rest, a phantom of her own creation.

THE END.